

T W O
N O V E L S.

In L E T T E R S.

BY THE AUTHORS OF
HENRY AND FRANCES.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

*Hi narrata ferunt aliò : mensuraque fìcti
Crescit; et auditis aliquid novus adjicit auctor.*

OVID. MET.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. BECKET and P. A. DE HONDT,
in the Strand.

M DCC LXIX.

NOV 19 1918

RECEIVED

LIBRARY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

THE
Delicate Distress,
A NOVEL.
IN LETTERS,
BY FRANCES.
PART I.

L'amour ne peut jamais subsister, sans peine,
dans une ame delicate, mais ses peines
mêmes, sont, quelquefois, la source de ses
plus doux plaisirs.

RECURL ANONYME.

THE

Delicate Difficulties

A NOVEL

IN LETTERS

BY FRANCES

PART I.

Il n'est pas de plus facile à saisir, sans peine
dans une ame délicate, mais les points
même, tout, cependant, il faut de la
plus douce église.

Revue Anonyme.

TO
HIS GRACE THE

DUKE OF BEDFORD.

S I R,

IF a private suffrage could add fame to a public character, we should be the foremost to express our opinion of your Grace's merits; "for they who speak thy praise secure their own." But as a compliment is always intended, in an address of this nature, we shall assume the sole honour of it to ourselves,

[vi]

selves, by declaring to the
world, that we are some of
the many, who have reason
to subscribe themselves,

With respect and gratitude,

Your Grace's,

much obliged, and
most obedient servants,

HENRY and FRANCES.

Patrick Hairs

P R E F A C E.

THE following work is submitted to the perusal of the public, with infinite timidity, and apprehension, as it is a species of writing, which I had never attempted before, from a consciousness of my deficiency, in the principal article of such compositions, namely, invention.

THE generality of NOVEL READERS may, therefore, probably, be disappointed in not meeting with any extraordinary adventure, or uncommon situation,

ation, in the following pages; while persons of a more natural taste, will, I flatter myself, be rather pleased at finding the stories and incidents, here related, such as might, for I affirm they did, and most of them to my own knowledge, certainly happen, in the various contingencies of real life.

BUT though I have not attempted to feign any fable, I acknowledge that I have endeavoured to conceal some truth, by changing scenes, and altering circumstances, in order to avoid too marked an application, of the several stories and characters, to the real persons, from whom I have taken my drama. We have no right, over other persons secrets, come they to our knowledge through whatsoever medium of intelligence, they may.—Accident confers none, and confidence forbids it.

As

P R E F A C E.

ix

As there is no fictitious memoir here related, neither is there any factitious moral displayed, to the incredulous reader, amongst all the various sentiments of this recital. I write not of puppets, but of men. I have endeavoured to describe the feelings, nay the foibles, of the human heart, such as we are naturally conscious of, in ourselves; but meddle not with *the wires of the stoics*, which only render us *machines*, by helping us to *perform a part*, of which we have *no sensation*.

I know not whether novel, like the *épopée*, has any rules, peculiar to itself— If it has, I may have innocently erred against them all, and drawn upon myself the envenomed rage of that tremendous body, the *minor critics*.—— But if I have spread a table for them, they shall be welcome to the treat, and
let

x P R E F A C E.

let them feed upon it, heartily.—
Sensibility is, in my mind, as necessary,
as taste, to intitle us to judge of a
work, like this; and a cold criticism,
formed upon *rules for writing*, can,
therefore, be of no manner of use,
but to enable the stupid to speak, with
a seeming intelligence, of what they
neither feel, nor understand.

L'ABBE Troublet, in his essays, on
literature and morals, says, “ *Si un*
“ *ouvrage sans défaut étoit possible, il ne*
“ *le seroit qu'à un homme mediocre.*”
And in another place, “ *Il n'y a rien*
“ *de plus different, qu'un ouvrage sans*
“ *défaut, & un ouvrage parfait.*”

I SHALL only add, that I sincerely
wish the subsequent pages had fewer
faults to exercise the good, or ill
nature, of my several readers; but I
must, now, throw myself, and my
book, with all its imperfections on its
head,

P R E F A C E. xi

head, upon the indulgence of the public, from whom I have received many favours, and to whom I am a truly grateful, and

Most obedient servant,

FRANCES.

ERRATA

VOL. I.

- P. 32. l. 14, read *Hanbury*.
- P. 37. the address, read *Lord Seymour*.
- P. 50. l. 3, dele *to*, and put a comma, after writing.
- P. 51. l. 6, read *what*.
- P. 72. l. 10, read, *and feared I should, &c.*
- P. 75. l. last, for *allowed*, read *allotted*.
- P. 90. l. 7: for *why*, read *how*.
- P. 123. put *and* at the beginning of l. 3.
- P. 192. line last, but four, put *be*, before the first word.
- P. 259. l. 10, read, *welfare*.

A

LIST of the SUBSCRIBERS.

A

THE Countess of Albemarle
Right Hon. Francis Andrews

George Ayscough, Esq;

James Agar, Esq;

Miss Agar

Welbore Agar, Esq;

Miss Aston

Lieutenant Adams

B

Earl of Blessington

Earl of Belvidere

Walter Butler, Esq;

John Butler, Esq;

Captain Henry Butler

Counsellor Pierce Butler

Amyas Bushe, Esq;

Gervis P. Bushe, Esq;

Rev. Thomas Bushe

John Bambrick, Esq;

Edmund Burke, Esq;

Archdeacon Browne

Doctor Edward Barry

Mrs. Jane Barry

Richard Barrett, Esq;

Mrs. Barrett

Captain Bassett

Major Brownrigg

Walter Bermingham, Esq;

Charles Boucher, Esq;

xiv S U B S C R I B E R S.

Captain Barclay
Rev. Peter Bristow
Rev. George Berkley
Mrs. Barnard
Cornet Badcock
Mrs. Bishopp
Mrs. Berkley
Mrs. Brooke
Rev. James Blair
Mr. John Braodley
Mrs. Browne
Mrs. Balfour

C

Earl of Clanricarde
Earl of Charlemont
Bishop of Clogher.
Bishop of Corke
Bishop of Cloyne
Hon. and Rev. Mr. Cholmondely
Hon. General Cholmondely
Hon. Mrs. Cholmondely
George Cholmondely, Esq;
Miss Cholmondely
Mrs. Cartwright
Mrs. Clive
Doctor Cadogan
General Carnac
Anthony Chamier, Esq;
Captain Alured Clarke
Rev. Robert Clarke, M. A.
Rev. Mr. Cocks
Rev. John Cliffe
Monsieur Le Chevalier Depiennes

SUBSCRIBERS. xv

Mrs. Crewe
Miss Cuffe
Cornet Callender
Miss Coningham.
Mrs. Cockburn
Captain John Cooke

D

Sir Robert Deane, Bart.
Joseph Deane, Esq;
William Davis, Esq;
James Lenox Dutton, Esq;
Mrs. Townley Dawson
Counsellor William Doyle

E

Colonel Thomas Eyre
Captain Ellis

F

Sir William Fownes, Bart.
William Fitzherbert, Esq;
Lady Frances Flood
Henry Flood, Esq;
Charles Flood, Esq;
John Flood, Esq;
Miss Flood
Counsellor James Fitzgerald
John Fitzgibbon, Esq;
Mrs. M. Forth

G

John Greene, Esq;
William Greene, Esq;
Counsellor Godfrey Greene
David Garrick, Esq;
Mr. Garston

b a

Major Edward Griffith

Mrs. Griffith

Doctor Goldsmith

Mrs. Gore

Miss Gore

Mrs. Grady

H

Reverend Dean Hancock

Gustavus Hancock, Esq;

John Hanbury, Esq;

Edward Hunt, Esq;

Robert Hartpole, Esq;

General Haviland

Mrs. Haviland

John Hobson, Esq;

Mrs. Hobson

Thomas Hodges, Esq;

Gorges Edmond Howard, Esq;

Captain Hugonin

Hon. Mrs. Hamilton

Rev. James Hamilton

Captain Hamilton

Cornet Hamilton

Archibald Roan Hamilton, Esq;

Mungo Haldane, Esq;

Mrs. Hopkins

Miss Hamilton

Miss Haughton

I

William Izod, Esq;

William Johnson, Esq;

Mr. Jennings

Rev. William Jephson

SUBSCRIBERS. xviii

K

Mrs. Kavanah
Miss Keppel
James Kearney, Esq;
Mrs. Elizabeth Kelly

L

Hercules Langrishe, Esq;
Rev. Dean Lewis
Gustavus Lambart, Esq;
Henry Lyons, Esq;
Mrs. Lumm
Mr. Edward Lord
Rev. Smyth Loftus

M

Earl of Mornington
Lord Viscount Mountgarret
Lord Mountmorres
Sir George Macartney
John M. Mason, Esq;
Mr. William Mitford
Justin Macarthy, Esq;
Mrs. Christian Macarthy
Thomas Paul Monck, Esq;
Captain Percy Monck
Thomas Monck, Esq;
Major James Mansergh, late of the eighth
regiment of dragoons
Lieutenant Bryan Mansergh, of the second
regiment of horse
John Manship, Esq;
Mrs. Maunfell
Captain Luke Mercer

xviii SUBSCRIBERS

N

Duke of Northumberland
Brockhill Newburgh, Esq;
Edward North, Esq;
Captain Nicholson

O

Murrough Obrien, Esq; 3 *sets*
Bishop of Offory
Robert Orme, Esq;

P

Lord Pigot
Miss Parry
Mrs. Pery
Rev. Thomas Pack
Henry James Pye, Esq;
Robert Hamden Pye, Esq;
Mrs. Hamden Pye
Mrs. Robert Pye
Rev. Mr. Penrick, of the Museum

Q

Doctor Quin

R

Lady Rich
Right Hon. Richard Rigby
Sir John Russel, Bart.
George Rochfort, Esq;
John Rochfort, Esq;
Dudley Ryves, Esq;
Mrs. Reade
Mr. William Richardson
Mr. John Richardson

S

Earl of Shannon
Sir Richard St. George, Bart.

SUBSCRIBERS. xix

Mrs. St. George
 Monf. Le Baron Van Staaden
 Rev. Thomas Stephens
 Walter Synnot, Esq;
 Marks Synnot, Esq;
 Luke Scrafton, Esq;
 William Smyth, Esq;
 Mrs. Smyth
 Mr. Thomas Stagg
 Rev. Doctor Sandford
 Ralph Schomberg, M.D. F.S.A.
 Richard Supple Esq;
 Rev. Anthony Sterling
 Mrs. Spooner
 Miss Swan
 Edward B. Swan, Esq;
 John Steare, Esq;

T

Mrs. Tilson
 Richard Tyfon, Esq;
 William Tighe, Esq;
 John Tickell, Esq;
 William Talbot, Esq;

V

Mrs. Victor

W

Earl of Wandesford
 Patrick Welch, Esq;
 Mrs. Walker
 Mrs. Margaret Wybrants
 Miss Wybrants
 Miss Elizabeth Wybrants

SUBSCRIBERS.

Mr. Stephen Wybrants
Mrs. Wilmot
Colonel Ward
Mrs. Williams
Mrs. Jane White
Miss Elizabeth Warren
Folliot Warren, Esq;
Edward Walth, Esq;
Rev. Samuel Woodroffe
Lieutenant Webb
Mrs. Rose Whitwell

Y

Mr. Young

THE

THE
DELICATE DISTRESS.

LETTER I.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

TELL me, my dear philosophic, wise sister, why those gloomy mortals, stiled moralists, take so much pains to put us out of humour with our present state of existence, by declaring that happiness is not the lot of man, &c. &c.? Do they think these dogmas enhance the value of felicity, as unexpected blessings are most prized? or is it that themselves, soured by mortifications and disappointments, which their vanity or caprice have occasioned, they are unwilling to

VOL. I.

B

ac-

2 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

acknowledge that degree of perfection, in any state, or being, which they do not themselves enjoy? But why do I argue, where I can at once confute? by declaring your Emily blessed to the utmost extent of her most romantic wishes; and feeling, if possible, an addition to her felicity, by knowing that you share it.

OUR journey was delightful; even the sun, which had not appeared for some days, shone forth on us, in its full lustre: creation smiled; the gladness of my heart gilded every object; I thought the birds sung hymeneals, and I was sorry when even Miss Weston's fine voice interrupted their still sweeter notes. My lord was—himself. I cannot say more, to express all that is tender, elegant, and polite.

LADY Harriet, who, you know, is of the gentle kind, looked assent to our happiness; yet frequent sighs escaped her. Why should she sigh? I have heard people say they do so from habit, without sensibility, or sensation. Time and use may possibly work such an effect, but this habit must certainly have had its rise, either from sickness, or sorrow. Perhaps

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 3

haps lady Harriet may be in love. If unhappily so, how truly to be pitied!

It is impossible I should yet be able to give you any idea of this fine old seat, nor do I think I shall ever attempt it. I had much rather you should see, than read its beauties. I hate flourishing descriptions. Modern writers over-dress nature, as ill-judging women do themselves. They give her parterres for patches, hanging woods for lappets, and embroider her beautiful green gown, with all the colours of the rainbow. I flatter myself that your taste (for it is elegant) will approve whatever my lord has planned; and I shall not insist much on your admiring the works of his ancestors. The closet, in which I am now writing, is charmingly situated. It commands—but after what I have just said, let me command my pen.

My lord, ever kind and attentive to me, wrote to his sister, lady Lawson, who lives eight miles off, to defer her visit, till this day, as it was probable I might have been fatigued with my journey. He speaks with such extreme tenderness of this lady, that I begin to love her, already, by anticipation.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

BUT hark, her carriage rolls into the
court-yard, and my heart steps forth to meet
her; but returns again to assure my dear
Fanny, that I am

her truly affectionate sister,

E. WOODVILLE.

LETTER

THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

LETTER II.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

MAY my dearest Emily ever continue an exception to those opinions, which, notwithstanding her present felicity, have too surely their foundation in this world's experience. The bitter ingredients of life, are, however, more sparingly scattered in the potions of some, than others; and I believe there may be many who have passed through life, without feeling one natural misfortune.—But then, these favourites of heaven, unworthy of its bounty, are apt to create afflictions for themselves, and mourn over ideal, for want of real distress.

THIS is a failing I am not at all apprehensive of your falling into, at least for some years to come; but as I have ever acted as a mother to my dearest Emily, or at least, endeavoured, as far as it was possible for me, to supply that loss to her infant years, let me now, with the same maternal tenderness, warn her against the contrary extreme, that of be-

6 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

ing too much elated, with her present joys,
“left while she clasps, she kill them.”

AND now, my Emily, a truce with moralizing, which I confess, would have been improper at this æra, but that you brought it on yourself; and I only appear in the character of the slave, who attended the triumphs of the Roman conquerors, merely to inform them they were mortal. Gracious heaven! that such an information should be necessary, to any of thy frail creatures! But I find myself relapsing, and will learn from you, to command my pen.

POOR lady Harriet! I am sorry she should have cause to sigh; for I agree with you, that sighing may be *incidental*, but not *accidental*. I hope the gay scene of receiving and returning visits, &c. in which she will be engaged with you, may help to dissipate the cloud of her chagrin. I rejoice in the acquisition of your new sister; she must be amiable, if lord Woodville loves her. What a compliment to my Emily! but let it rather make her grateful, than vain.

I FEAR

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 7

I FEAR I shall not have an opportunity of approving my taste, by admiring lord Woodville's improvements, for some time. Sir John, who is not a little jealous of your not having mentioned him, purposes going, for a couple of months, to Paris. Do not grow jealous, in your turn. I do not intend to accompany him, to that gay scene, which would have fewer charms for me, than the rational, and rural pleasures, of Woodfort. But I design to inoculate my little Edward and Emily, during his absence. I shall not acquaint him with my intention, till it is over. I know he wishes it done; and I would spare him the anxiety of a fond father, upon such an occasion. I know too, he will be vastly obliged to me, for laying hold of this opportunity; for it is an invariable maxim, that all men hate trouble, of every kind, and choose to be out of the way, when there is any disagreeable operation to be performed.

My sister Traffon, who you know is to be married to Sir James Miller, has determined to take her chance, with my children. She says she could not answer it to her conscience, to marry Sir James, who seems to be enamoured of her face, till she has put her features beyond

B. 4.

yond.

8 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

yond the common danger of an alteration. I went with her, last night, to Ranelagh—as she said, to take leave of it: I hope but for a short time.

THE attention of the whole assembly, was taken up with a beautiful foreigner, the marchioness de St. Aumont. I think I never beheld so much vivacity and sweetness joined, before, in the same countenance. I have just looked up at your picture, and thought it tacitly reproached me, for having so soon forgot my Emily's face. I'll look again. Her eyes have more vivacity, I must confess, but yours a greater sweetness. Hers are black, yours blue. The advantage, which each of you have, over the other, in this particular, may be more owing to colour, than expression.

THE marchioness has been a widow, about a year, and does not appear to be above twenty. I am certain that if I were a man, I should be in love with her. I am glad she has left Paris, before my *Straffon* goes thither—you may read *Strephon*, if you please. I shall take care to keep him out of danger, while he stays in London; or perhaps, she might keep him fighting, at home, and so mar both his scheme, and

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 9

and mine. The very best of these men, my dear Emily, have hearts nearly resembling tinder, though they would have us think they are made of sterner stuff—a sparkling eye sets them all in a blaze.

LADY Sandford, who doats upon foreigners, has already engrossed her; perhaps she may engage her to go with her into the country. If so, you will, probably, meet her, at York races; and if that should happen, it will be absolutely necessary for lord Woodville to arm himself, cap-à-pie, with constancy, and for you also, to rivet the joints of that armour, with unaffected complacency, cheerfulness, and love.

LUCY and Sir James Miller are in the drawing-room. I fancy she is tired of a tête-à-tête, as the fondest lovers sometimes are; for she has just sent your little name-sake, to request my company. I must, therefore, quit you, to attend her summons. I shall expect a particular account of all occurrences, at Woodfort, as the most minute matter, that relates to you, must ever be of consequence to your affectionate

FRANCES STRAFFON.

B 5

P. S.

10 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

P. S. As I have yet time enough to send my letter, I shall acquaint you with the occasion of my being called from it. Lucy had just informed Sir James that she intended to be inoculated. He opposed it, with the utmost vehemence, and told many stories, upon that subject, to intimidate her. In vain ; she continued firm to her purpose.

HE then intreated that they might be married, before the operation, and he would give his consent to her undergoing it, in ten days after. This she absolutely refused ; and, I think, with good reason. The altercation grew warm, on both sides ; I was chosen umpire ; and gave my opinion, in favour of Lucy's arguments. Sir James said I was a partial judge, and quitted us, soon after, with some little warmth.

I WAS sorry to perceive a starting tear, in Lucy's lovely eye, and rallied her, on being low-spirited. She confessed she felt a kind of foreboding, that the union between Sir James and her, would never be accomplished ; and yet said, she had not the least apprehension that her death would prevent it. I told her
that

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. II

that I foresaw nothing else that could, as her Beauty was even less in danger from this experiment, than her life.

SHE replied, that they were both of them but transient blessings, and she had, happily, brought her mind to such a state of resignation, as to be fully prepared for the loss of either. But she owned that she had not yet accustomed herself to the thought of resigning Sir James: however, if she was to lose his affection, she could better sustain that affliction, before marriage, than after.

HERE her eyes streamed again, and while I was endeavouring to dissipate these gloomy vapours, Sir John luckily came in, to the relief of us both, as it put an end to the subject of inoculation, which I told you before, he is not to receive the least hint about, for the present. Both Lucy and he are affectionately yours, and rejoice with me in your happiness.

Once more, adieu, and good night.

F. STRAFFORD.

12 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

L E T T E R I I I .

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

My dear FANNY,

I DID not insist upon the permanence of human felicity. I said only, that there was such a thing as perfect happiness, and, I hope, with a truly grateful heart, acknowledged myself in possession of that rare treasure. However, your letter has given a little alloy to it, and rendered it less pure, and unmixed.

I FEEL for you, on your childrens account, and for Lucy, on her own. She has long determined on inoculation: she mentioned it to lady Harriet, before I was married, and made her will, the day after she became of age. I admire her fortitude, but fear I should not be able to imitate it.

YOUR description of the marchioness, is really alarming, and has already made me jealous, not of lord Woodville, but of lady Straffon. If you should ever become acquainted with her, she will certainly rival every

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 13

every body, but Sir John, and the dear little ones. Perhaps Lucy's heroism may still preserve her some place in your heart, but the poor absent Emily will be totally forgotten, when you already begin to stand in need of her picture, to remind you of her.

My lord, and lady Harriet, both knew her, in Paris, and both agree that the charms of her person, are inferior to those of her mind; and that she was still more admired, as un bel esprit, than as une belle dame. Won't you give me credit for the utmost generosity, in furnishing you with this account of my rival, that is to be?

I HOPE she may come to York races, that I may have an opportunity of examining this phoenix, with a critic's eye; but it shall not be like the modern ones, who are, generally, so intent on spying defects, that they are apt to overlook the most striking beauties. This, however, may sometimes proceed, rather from a want of taste, than a spirit of malevolence, and I am always inclined to pity those unhappy people, who never seem to be pleased.

CHARM-

14 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

CHARMING lady Lawson! What an engaging countenance, what a quick sensibility in her looks, what an irresistible smile! I am not under a necessity of looking at my bracelet, to remind me that this portrait resembles lady Straffon: but lady Lawson is taller, thinner, and more of the brunette. She is two years younger than my lord, and has been, married six years, to Sir William Lawson, who seems to be what they call a jolly, good-humoured man. He hates London, loves fox hunting, and has, they say, no exception to a chearful glass, or a pretty lass. I fear poor lady Lawson was thrown away; though Sir William is generally esteemed, what they call, a good husband. He behaves outwardly well to his wife, merely because she is so, and would have treated her chambermaid, in the same manner, if he had happened to marry her. What a mortifying situation, to a woman of delicacy!

THE meeting between her and my lord, was truly affectionate, and tender. She had not seen him since his return from making the grand-tour. She thanked him, in the most graceful manner, for increasing her happiness, by ensuring his own, and she also hoped,
4. that

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 15

that of so amiable a person, she was pleased to add, as lady Woodville. My lord replied, that if any thing could add to his felicity, it must be her approbation of his choice, which he was certain would increase with her knowledge of his dear Emily. He then joined our hands, bowed, and withdrew. How kind in him to bespeak her favour for me! But I shall endeavour to deserve, what she seems so ready to bestow.

LADY Harriet's dove-like eyes glistened with pleasure, at her cousin's politeness. She said there was a nearer relation between lady Lawson and me, than what my lord had given us, for we had kindred souls.

HERE the arrival of a great deal of company, put an end to all conversation. Is it not surprizing, sister, that where there are most words, there is generally the least sense? And yet, it is always the case; for I never remember to have met with any thing like rational discourse, in a company that exceeded five or six.

LORD and lady Withers, their two daughters, the eldest a fine woman, and once intended

16 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

tended as a wife for lord Woodville. The point had been settled between their fathers, but the death of old lord Woodville, happily for me, left the son at liberty, to chuse for himself. She appeared to be in some confusion, when he saluted her, and I felt myself a good deal distressed, on her account.

WOMEN are not such wretches, as men misrepresent them. Conquest, I own, is pleasant, but I detest a triumph. It sinks one, methinks, below the vanquished. Her sister is pretty, young, and modest. I think the whole family amiable, and agreeable.

SIR Harry Ransford, and his lady—What a pair! He old, gouty, and peevish—she young, handsome, and vulgar. His son, by a former wife, polite, and sensible, with a well-made, genteel person. My lord and he were intimate, abroad. I wish he would fall in love with our dear lady Harriet. Nay, he certainly will do so. I can't possibly see how he can well avoid it.

MR. Watson, Mr. Young, Mr. Haywood, &c. What a croud! You would have pitied me, Fanny. Though I have been four months married,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 17

married, I was so be-bridged, and wished joy, that it made me downright sad. Lady Law-son was very useful to me, in assisting to entertain the company. She has, in her manners and address, a great deal of that graceful, and courtly ease, which I always admire, in others, without having ever been able to obtain, in myself. But all farther endeavours after this perfection, are, henceforward, at an end with me, and I hope now to be able to preserve my *mauvaise honte*, during life; for after twenty, it is rarely to be overcome, without *paying too dear*, for the conquest.

In the afternoon, the younger part of my lord's tenants, appeared in the avenue, neatly dressed, and adorned with all the honours of the spring, and forming a long dance together. My lord proposed our going out to see them; I found this had been designed, as there was a large carpet spread on the lawn, and seats already prepared for us.

WHEN we were seated, they passed by, in couples, chanting a rustic hymn, in praise of Hymen, and strewing flowers before me. At length, they presented me with a beautiful, and fragrant wreath, which I immediately placed
on

18 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

on lord Woodville's brow, while the villagers retreated singing, and forming themselves into a rural dance, infinitely more agreeable to me, than any of the grands balets, at the opera, or theatres. We left them at their sport, and returned into the house.

AFTER tea, my lord proposed our following the example of his merry peasants. This was readily assented to, by every one, but Sir Harry Ransford, who told us he never lay within ten miles of his own house, after the twenty fifth of March; and insisted upon lady Ransford's going away with him, that instant, as he said they should hardly be able to reach home, by his usual time of going to bed, at nine o'clock, summer and winter.

WE all intreated that he would permit lady Ransford to stay, which he peremptorily refused, saying, it would be setting an ill example to the bridegroom, to let women have their way. She said every thing in her power to prevail, but when she found it in vain, and that he would force her away, she was provoked, at last, to call him methodical monster. He replied, that it was better to be *one*, by his own *method*, than hers, and hobbled

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 191

bled into his coach. She followed, with the face of a fury. What a delightful tête-à-tête must theirs be!

MR. RANSFORD staid, and danced with me. I think him the best dancer I ever saw. Our little ball got the better of all disagreeable reserve; and, at supper, we appeared like old acquaintance, perfectly at ease, and quite cheerful. My lord was in remarkable good spirits, and even lady Harriet seemed gay. The Withers's are a charming family; both the young ladies play on the harpsichord, and sing finely.

WE had an agreeable concert, the next day; they staid till late in the evening. Sir William and lady Lawson went home, this morning. We are to return their visit, to-morrow. Mr. Ransford is still with us. He is a great lover of music: I fancy there is not much harmony, in his father's house, and where the instruments of a matrimonial concert, do not found in *unison*, the discord is most grating.

I SHALL long, impatiently, for every post, till I hear that all your patients are out of danger.

20 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

danger. Lucy's prefages, with regard to Sir James, are only the effect of low spirits. I never saw any man, I think, more in love, than he appears to be. I cannot, however, bear the thoughts of his consenting to her being inoculated, in ten days after their marriage. Selfish wretch! Don't let Lucy see this paragraph.

I HAVE NOW shewn my obedience to my dear motherly sister's commands, by entering into a minute detail of every thing that has passed at Woodfort. I am disappointed at not having the pleasure of seeing her here; yet I highly applaud the disposition of that time she promised to bestow on

her affectionate,

E. WOODVILLE.

P. S. Sir John has no reason to be jealous, while I can, with truth, declare I love but one man in the world, better than him.

LETTER

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 21

LETTER IV.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

I AM much obliged to my dear Emily, for the entertaining detail of her amusements in the country. I am charmed with your account of lady Lawson, and am not, like my dear spoiled child, the least inclined to be jealous. I thank you for the flattering likenesses, you have drawn of me; may there be a still stronger resemblance between us, in our love and esteem for lady Woodville.

I THINK you extremely happy in meeting with such an amiable friend, in so agreeable a neighbour. She will, I doubt not, be kind enough to inform you of the *Carte du Païs*, where you are situated: and what is of infinitely more consequence to your happiness, she may, perhaps, acquaint you with the particularities of her brother's temper; for be assured, all charming as he is, that he has some, the knowing, and treating of which properly, may be the surest basis of your future felicity.

SIR John set out, for Paris, last Monday, and, in an hour after, Mr. Ranby inoculated

Lucy

22 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Lucy and my dear children. Though I have the firmest reliance on the goodness of Providence, and the fullest conviction of the general success of this operation, the mother could not stand it. I was forced to retire to my closet. I repented my not having acquainted Sir John, with my design, and thought, that if any misfortune should happen to either of the children, even his grief would seem a constant reproach to me.

IN this situation of mind, I poured forth my soul in fervent prayer, before the throne of mercy. My apprehensions vanished, the rectitude of my intentions confirmed my resolution, and I felt myself perfectly calm, and resigned. Amazing efficacy of true devotion! But indeed, my dear Emily, there is no other resource for the afflicted. No other balm to heal the wounded soul. By this, and this alone, we are enabled to triumph over pain, sickness, distress, sorrow, even death itself.

THE children are in a fine way, and have received the infection. Lucy, it is thought, has not. She insists upon being inoculated again, to-morrow. Sir James supped with
us,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 23

us, on Sunday night ; and told us, with a grave face, that he should not see us again, till this affair was quite over ; for if he visited here, he could go no where else. I laughed, and bid him stay away, if he could.

THOUGH I did not think him serious, he has hitherto kept his word, but sends a formal card, every day, to inquire our healths. I see that his behaviour hurts Lucy, though she affects not to take notice of it. I hear he spends all his time with Miss Nelson. She is artful, and agreeable. I begin to fear poor Lucy's presage may be verified.

ADIEU, my dearest Emily, I shall not write to you, again, till I can congratulate you on the perfect recovery of our invalids. Till then, and ever, I am,

most affectionately, yours,

F. STRAFFON.

LETTER

24 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

L E T T E R V.

Sir JA. THORNTON, To Lord WOODVILLE.

THE devil's in it, if the honey moon is not over yet, and you near half a year married. This is carrying on the farce, too far, and looks as if you wanted to make us infidels believe, that pleasure was to be found, in the sober and virtuous scheme of matrimony.

I ALLOW your wife to be handsome. I will suppose her lively, and agreeable, too; but then, have you not had time enough to be tired of all these perfections? and whenever that happened, the more merit a woman has, the greater our dislike.

I SHOULD never forgive a wife that did not supply me with a reason for hating, when I grew weary of her. But I fancy I need not be in any manner of pain, on that account; for the precious creatures have, generally, a quantum sufficit, of foible and caprice, to answer that end; at least, all those I have ever con-

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 25

conversed with, appeared to be compounded of nothing else, after one month's intimate acquaintance.

You will, perhaps, tell me, that lad Woodville is a very different kind of woman, from those I hint at. It may be so; and I will admit it. But prithee, Harry, is she not your wife? And in that comprehensive term, are not restraint, care, limitation of pleasures, and squalling brats, included? But love her, if you will, and as long as you can: but, believe me, the only way to keep such a sickly flame alive, is, by the fuel of absence.

THEREFORE, order your horses directly, and leave her, where she should ever remain, fixed to the freehold; while you shine forth, once more, among your old friends, at the Shakespear. I write this, by order of the society, from which you will be excluded, if you do not appear, upon this summons, from
Your's, &c.

J. T.

26 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

L E T T E R VI.

*From Lord WOODVILLE, To Sir JAMES
THORNTON.*

Dear THORNTON,

I RECEIVED your lively letter; but wish you had chosen a fitter subject to display your wit upon, than the old common-place topic of matrimony. Were I not perfectly acquainted with your writing, as well as your humour, I should have thought your letter a counterfeit. You are no libertine, Thornton, and yet seem to take pleasure in adopting their gross, and contemptible sentiments.

THEIR general abuse of women, is truly ridiculous: they pretend to know them, without having ever conversed with any, but that unhappy species of them, whose minds and manners are a disgrace, not only to their sex, but to human nature, itself. Profligates first betray to infamy all the women they can deceive; and then, by a double injustice, judge of the sex, from the examples they have made.

BUT

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 27

BUT come, my young friend, and convince yourself, that happiness is to be found in a virtuous connection with an amiable, and agreeable woman. Order your horses, directly, I say; and leave your gross errors where they should ever remain, in Covent Garden.

I NEVER was a member of any society at the Shakespear, though I have spent some evenings there, both pleasantly and innocently. I love chearfulness, wit, and humour, wherever to be met with; and when Sir James Thornton shall be added to our society at Woodfort, I shall not have occasion to go in pursuit of any of them, elsewhere. As a farther inducement, we shall go to York races. I know you have horses to run there. Hasten then, to

Your's sincerely,

WOODVILLE.

28 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

L E T T E R VII.

Lord SEYMOUR, To Lord WOODVILLE.

My dear Lord,

I ARRIVED in London, the day after you left it: how unfortunate to have missed the friend of my heart! to whom I have a thousand things to communicate, that will not bear the cold, flow forms, of narrative letter-writing.

BUT one sad truth I must pour into your bosom, from mine, that almost bursts whilst I repeat it. The lovely, the angelic Charlotte Beaumont, has fled from these fond arms, and taken refuge, in a convent! I beheld her, renounce the pomps, and vanities, of that world, which she was born to adorn. None but her kindred angels ever appeared so beautiful as she, when led, like a blooming sacrifice, to the altar.

As she advanced up the isle, she caught my eyes; she stopt, and sigh'd; but quickly recollecting herself, turned *her's* to heaven—then with a ray of that ineffable tenderness, with which we may suppose angelic beings
look

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 29

look on mortal woes, she turned them full on me—but ah! too soon recalled them, and passed along, with all the dignity of conscious virtue!

How I got out of the convent, I know not: my senses vanished, with her.—I was fifteen days delirious; and but for the officious kindness of Wilton, should not now feel those poignant agonies, that rend my heart. O Woodville, to lose such a woman, by my own folly! That fatal duel, in what misery has it involved me! When I am calm enough, if that should ever be, I will copy her *last letter*, and send it to you: I would not part with the original, for worlds, though it has destroyed my peace, in this.

WILL you forgive your wretched friend, for breaking in, one moment, on your present felicity? I hear you are completely blessed—This is the only ray of joy, that ever can, or shall pervade the gloom, in which my fate is involved. Happy Woodville! to triumph over an unhappy passion, and now to feel the transports of successful love!

BUT let me intreat you, as you value your future peace, not to see the marchioness.

30 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Your wounds are not long healed, and may all bleed again. She is a true Calypso! therefore, my friend, shun her ensnaring wiles! and remember you are accountable for the happiness of an amiable, and innocent young woman:—what a breach of honour, even to hazard it!

THIS single consideration will, I am certain, be a more powerful preservative to your generous heart, than all the philosophic reasonings, in the world; which too well I know, were never yet proof against strong passion.

ADIEU, my friend: that you may continue to deserve, and possess, every happiness this world can give, is now the warmest wish of your unhappy

SEYMOUR.

LET.

L E T T E R V I I I.

Lord WOODVILLE, To Lord SEYMOUR.

My dear, unhappy Friend,

I AM truly sorry that I had left London, before your arrival.—Had you given me the least hint of your intentions to return, I should certainly have staid to meet you : and I would, at this moment, fly to pour the balm of friendship, into your wounded bosom, but that Sir James Thornton, whom I have invited to spend some time with me, at Woodfort, and go with me to York races, came here, last night.

He is quite a stranger to lady Woodvil'e, and all this family, and would certainly consider it as the highest breach of hospitality, if I were to leave him in the hands of a parcel of *virtuous* women, which are a race of beings, that he is totally unacquainted with. He is young, has a very large fortune, and many amiable qualities; but his education has been so shamefully neglected, that he is in imminent danger of becoming a prey, to sharpers, and prostitutes.

32 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

EVEN you must have smiled, to have seen this young man, who is made up of frolic, and vivacity, look as frightened and abashed, before lady Woodville, who is gentleness itself, as a young country lady, who has never been out of the family mansion, when first presented at St. James's. But I hope this timid awkwardness will wear off, in a few days: and as I know nothing that can refine the sentiments, or polish the manners, so much, as the conversation of elegant women, I wish to keep Sir James, for some time, amongst us.

My cousin, lady Harriet Hartston, is here; and a very lively girl, miss Weston, a near relation of my Emily! Your old friend, Ransford, spends much of his time with us, also. What would I not give to tempt you hither? You shall retire when you please; read, walk, and muse, alone: and when you are disposed, my Emily shall play to you, some of the sweetest, softest airs, the very food of love, accompanied with the sweetest, softest voice, you ever heard. Harriet, who is of the melancholy cast, and, I fear, unhappily in love, shall sigh, in concert with you; and
Thornton

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 33

Thornton, and miss Weston, shall sometimes make you smile.

I CONFESS to you, my dear Seymour, that I was both shocked, and sorry, when I heard that the marchioness was in England. Lady Woodville was the first person who informed me of it: but, utterly ignorant of there having ever been any connection between us, she did not perceive my emotion, at her name.

CRUEL woman! does she wish again to disturb the peace of a heart, which she had well nigh broken! but I defy her power.—In lady Woodville, I have found all that is amiable in the most lovely sex; sensible, beautiful, gentle, kind, and unaffectedly good.

TRUE, she is not mistress of those lively fallies of wit, that dazzle the understanding, and captivate the heart. Her form, though lovely, has not the striking elegance, the nameless, numberless graces, that wait on every motion of the marchioness!

34 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

BUT why do I suffer myself to dwell upon her charms? or make a comparison injurious to the amiable woman, who deserves my love? why can I not say, who possesses it! Ah, Seymour! it is impossible to regulate the emotions of the human heart, by the cold rules of reason. Not all the charms of the whole sex combined, can ever render mine susceptible of those agonizing transports, it has already known. Yet let me boast, that it is as impossible for her, who first occasioned, to revive, as for any other woman, to inspire them.

IF this was not the case, I should have made a worthless present to my Emily, when I gave her both my hand, and heart: and tho' I allow the latter not to be an adequate return for hers, she shall never be able to discover its deficiency, by any word, or action, of my life. This I can safely promise.

I HAVE purposely avoided mentioning your lost, your lovely Charlotte! When you are more at ease, I know you will acquaint me with the particulars of your distress. Why may not that happy æra be hastened, by a
reliance

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 35

reliance on all the tender cares of friendship,
which you may certainly depend on, from

Your ever affectionate

WOODVILLE.

P. S. You have a house, within a mile of
York; where we have spent many happy
days—“Days of ease, and nights of plea-
sure.” Who knows but we may there re-
cover our juvenile tastes and passions? im-
possible! As well, when advanced in life,
might we hope to recover our youth, *in those
fields where we once were young.*—But is
that house untenanted? Will you be our
host? or have you let, or lent it?

L E T T E R IX.

Lady SEYMOUR, To Lord WOODVILLE.

My dear WOODVILLE,

YOUR letter has added to the affliction I am already involved in. I think I am fated never to possess any of those blessings, without which life is a burthen. The object of my fondest, tenderest wishes, already torn from my bleeding heart; there remained yet one consolation; a generous, and affectionate friend; and he, inhuman suicide, is going to rob me of himself! what an hard lot is mine! all that I ever loved, devote themselves; and by their misery, I am twice undone!

BUT stop, my friend! and let my warning voice prevent your rushing down the precipice! you must not, shall not, see the marchioness. I will go to Woodfort, though heaven knows how unfit to mingle in society, merely to prevent your going to York races.—The Syren will be there.—

I WENT,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 37

I WENT, last night, to pay a visit to my sister, lady Sandford, and there I met your lovely enemy. She asked many questions about you, but many more about lady Woodville, and wanted me to draw her picture. I told her that I had not seen her, for some years; that she was then extremely young, but had, I thought, a very near resemblance to her ladyship, which was pronouncing her a perfect beauty.

I SAID this, to prevent her finding fault, which she certainly would have done, had I attempted a particular description. She saw through my design, but would not let me triumph in the success of it, then smiling said, "Like me! perhaps that was the reason he chose her.—Constant creature! this is a compliment, for which I think myself more indebted to him, than for all the fine things, he ever said, or wrote to me."

I hope, madam, his lordship had other motives. "O fye, lord Seymour, how you love to mortify? but pray let me indulge my vanity, a little. As the man is married, and to a perfect beauty, too, there can be no danger in avowing my sensibility of his
" regards

38 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ regards. This, you know, I never did,
“ while he was single, and I might have hopes.
“ But women have strange caprices.

“ HOWEVER, I can assure you I have not
“ the least design, upon his heart. It would
“ be the height of vanity, indeed, to attempt
“ rivalling this *perfect beauty*.” It would be
the height of cruelty, madam, but to wish it.
“ I declare I cannot see it in that light, my
“ lord; for such a woman can never want
“ adorers.” Our married ladies, madam,
seek for that character, only in their husbands.
“ Nay now, my lord, you want to impose on
“ me, as I am a stranger; but you cannot
“ deceive me, for I know numberless in-
“ stances to contradict your assertion, and
“ not one to prove it. And I really think
“ that London is as much the seat of galantry,
“ as Paris.”—

THE arrival of other company, gave the
conversation a general turn; but what I have
repeated, is, I think, sufficient to make you
fly from a woman, who audaciously owns
her designs against your peace. As she talked
of going to York, my sister, who is to accom-
pany her, requested I would let her have my
house,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 39

house, which I readily assented to; but were it unemployed, I would refuse it to my dear Woodville.

YOU see the snare is laid, and will you self-devoted rush into it; I know you, Woodville, you cannot live with loss of honour, and it is impossible to preserve your's, if in your present situation, you can be again drawn in, to doat upon this.—But I will not abuse her. I shall set out for Woodfort, to-morrow, and there enforce every argument I have used, to preserve you from yourself.

Till then, adieu.

SEYMOUR.

LET-

L E T T E R X.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

I CANNOT tell my dearest Fanny how much her last letter affected me; nor can I sufficiently express my admiration of that happy turn of mind, that enables you to triumph over every difficulty and distress, and to rise so far superior to what any one might reasonably expect, from the gentleness of your nature, on every trial.

How happy is it for your poor weak Emily, that she has had nothing to struggle with! she would have sunk beneath the slightest weight, and given a loose to tears, and to complainings. But let the goodness of that all-wise Providence, who proportions our trials to our strength, fill my heart with the warmest gratitude, and let me "ever bless, and praise his name."

I HAVE no sort of doubt but you are eased of all a mother's fears, by this time, and that the dear little ones are prattling round you,
with

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 41

with their usual chearfulness ; while you feel, even an additional tenderness from recollection, of the danger they have past.

I HAVE very uneasy apprehensions, for poor Lucy : I almost wish she may not receive the infection.—There have been numberless instances of persons who never had the small-pox ; and I think it is like forcing nature, to make a second effort.

I DETEST Sir James Miller ; and hope, with all my heart, he may never be married to Lucy, as I am very sure he never will deserve her.

OUR family party has received some very agreeable additions, since I wrote last. There is a most delightful contrast, between our visitors. Sir James Thornton, lively, boyish, with a good natural understanding, totally unimproved, without the least idea of good breeding ;—and yet, that want is amply supplied, by what I call natural politeness. But if “ good breeding is the blossom of good sense,” we ought to find out some other term, for that species of form, which is only to be acquired in courts. There was such an awkward

42 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

awkward reserve, about poor Thornton, for the first three days he spent at Woodfort, that I looked upon him as a Hottentot : but that rough cast is now worn off, and he is really agreeable, and entertaining.

LORD Seymour, our latest guest, is, really, an accomplished gentleman ; an elegant form, and affable countenance, bespeak your favour, at first sight, and his every word and action insensibly engage your regard. Yet, lavish as nature has been to him, there seems to be something wanting to his happiness. There is a tender air of melancholy, diffused over his whole form, with such a softness in his voice, and manner, as is rarely natural to the gay sons of prosperity. His fortune is ample, and his birth high ; it must then be that source of the most poignant sorrow, ill-fated love, that has disturbed his peace. Yet, I think, he could not love in vain, unless there was a prior prepossession. I long to know his story : I feel myself interested, as for a brother.

HE acquainted my lord with his intention to visit us, the night before he came. We
were

were all engaged to dine at Sir Harry Ransford's, the next day; and her ladyship had got the old knight to consent to her having a ball. My lord remained at Woodfort, to receive his guest. I accompanied the young folks, to Sir Harry's.—After tea, I intreated lady Ransford to excuse my leaving her, without taking any notice of it to the company. She was so obliging as to consent, and I drove home, directly.

My lord seemed surprized, and pleased, at seeing me; and, as he handed me from the coach, said, with an air of the utmost tenderness, I am much obliged to you for your attention to my friend; and can with truth assure you, that your company is the only agreeable addition, that could be made, to our present society. My little heart exulted, at the kindness of this compliment; as to please, or oblige him, is, and ever will be, its highest ambition. Notwithstanding this, I thought my company was a restraint on them, and therefore retired, soon after supper.

It was four o'clock, when my lord came up stairs.—I was miserably apprehensive he was ill, as he sighed often, and was uncommonly

44 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

monly restless. But my fears are now fled, like a morning dream.—He seemed perfectly well, at breakfast. Lord Seymour and he are gone into the gardens.

THE coach is just returned, with the boys and girls; and Thornton is, this moment, come into my dressing-room, to tell me *all about it*, as he expresses himself: but he is too civil to speak, till I leave off writing. I must, therefore, impose silence on myself, to relieve him from it; and so bid my dear sister,

Adieu.

E. W.

LET.

L E T T E R X I.

From Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

I WAS vastly pleased with my dear Emily's letter.—There is infinitely more merit, in looking up to the Almighty, in our prosperity, than adversity. Praise is surely the noblest, and, of course, the most acceptable sacrifice, that a human creature can offer, to the great Author of good. Mr. Addison, very justly observes, that “a mind, which has the least “turn to religion, naturally flies to it, in “affliction.” We then feel our own insufficiency; we are humbled by sorrow, and perhaps only then, deduce real satisfaction from a thorough conviction, that there is a superior being, whose aid is graciously promised, to those who sincerely seek it. But, surrounded by the delights of life, youth, fortune, gaiety, and dissipation, we too frequently become forgetful of the source, from whence our blessings flow; and while we are indulging all our appetites, in the delicious stream of happiness, it becomes impregnated with the qualities of Lethe, and renders us unmindful of its fountain.

BUT

46 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

BUT let me be truly thankful, that the sister of my love, the child of my care, is not only blessed with the insignia of happiness, but with a heart capable of the first virtue, gratitude; which, I hope, will ensure to her the long, and full possession, of all earthly good.

I NOW can tell my dear prophets, her hopes are accomplished.—The mother's fears are lost, in the happy certainty of my children's perfect recovery.—But the friend still suffers:—poor Lucy continues extremely ill, though, thank God, this day pronounced out of danger. The small-pox was as favourable to her, as possible; but the emotions of her mind, on account of that wretch, Sir James Miller, has thrown her into a violent fever.

HE is, this day, to be married, to Miss Nelson! This she is yet ignorant of: but on the first day that she sat up, she received a kind of leave-taking letter from him, excusing his perfidy, by her want of complaisance to his request. Said, “he had reason to apprehend, that a lady, who seemed so little inclined to oblige him, before marriage,

—riage,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 47

“riage, would not make a very complying
“wife;—that he was glad to hear her beauty
“was out of danger, as there was no doubt,
“but it would procure her a better husband,
“than him; and that he should endeavour
“to look out for a wife, who was less
“anxious about her features.” Was there
ever any thing so provoking! This is adding
insolence, to baseness!

IF Sir John was here, I am sure a duel
would ensue.—I know not how to act, in this
affair.—I cannot bear the thoughts of his
triumphing in his villainy; nor yet can I
think of hazarding Sir John’s life, to punish
such a scoundrel. Swift says, “the *occasions*
“are few, that can induce a man of sense,
“and virtue, to draw his sword.” I am
certain, were he living, he would allow this
to be a justifiable *one*.

BUT as a wife and mother, I most sincerely
hope, Sir John may never hear of his infamous
behaviour: but what excuse to invent, for
breaking off the match, I know not. Sir John
is jealous of his honour, and will inquire
minutely into the affair. I will refer it all to
Lucy’s

48 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Lucy's prudence: she loves her brother, and is a christian.

You are an admirable painter. I should have known Lord Seymour's picture, if you had not set his name to it; all but that shade of melancholy, which you have thrown over it. He was extremely lively, when I knew him; but I have not seen him, since his return to England.

You have made me perfectly acquainted with Sir James Thornton: I saw his precipitate stride into your dressing-room, and his short stop, on finding you were writing. It reminded me of the snapping of a watch-spring. Have you ever had one break in your hand? Lucy has just awoke, from a refreshing sleep; and, on being told I was writing, she desires to see me immediately. I will return to you, again.

WHAT an affecting interview! That odious idiot, Sir James Miller, has, "like the base Indian, thrown a pearl away, richer than all his tribe." When I went into Lucy's chamber, she desired every one to with-

withdraw : then taking my hand, and pressing it to her lips, What infinite trouble must I have given to the compassionate heart of my dear lady Straffon ! but I hope you do not despise me : it was the weak state of my body, that overpowered my mind. But now, that I have recovered my senses, I am amazed how I could be affected, by the loss of such a man. —Did I say loss ? then, I fear, I rave again. But I grieved for an ideal character ; and am much obliged to Sir James, for removing the mist from before my eyes, and shewing himself in his native colours. How happy, the delusion vanished, so soon ! Had it continued but a little longer, I should have been a wretch, indeed ! What a misery, to despise the man, whom it is our duty to love and honour ! Yet such might have been my fate ! Should I have been unpardonably criminal, my dearest sister ?

I INTREATED her, not to think upon the subject, but to calm her spirits ; and that I would converse with her on any other topic, that she pleased.—She begged my attention, for a few minutes ; said, she had wandered

50 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

from her purpose, and asked my pardon for detaining me. You are writing to lady Straffon; perhaps, to my brother. Then raising herself on her knees, in spite of my efforts to hinder her, Let me, in this humble posture, intreat you, my dearest sister, not to mention what has passed, to Sir John. I know his natural bravery, joined to his love for an only sister, would tempt him to call Sir James Miller to an account.—Good God! what might be the consequence! He has done me no wrong; and should any misfortune happen to my brother, from this event, I could not answer for my senses. And were even the aggressor, for such indeed he is, to fall, I never should know peace again.

HERE she was quite overcome by weakness, and sunk down, in a flood of tears. I said every thing in my power, to assuage her grief; and gave her the strongest assurances, that I neither had, or would mention a syllable of the affair, to Sir John. She told me then, I had restored her tranquillity; and she should soon be well, and able to contrive some plausible pretence to her brother, for breaking off the match: and as this would be the first falsehood

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 51

hood she had ever told him, she hoped it might be considered as a *pious fraud*, only.

AFTER this conversation, she grew perfectly composed; I left her retired to rest: but, I fear, she has disturbed mine, for this night. When an amiable heart is her's? While yet smarting with undeserved wounds, she would preserve the cruel wretch who inflicted them! I will religiously keep my promise to her; yet cannot help sincerely wishing, that his crime may be his punishment; and, I think, he bids fair for being overpaid, in kind.

i
ti
be

I FEEL
cannot help

52 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Alas ! my Emily, I am too severe ; for they are, in general, synonymous terms. I will, in charity, wish you good night ; for, if I write on, I shall rail more : therefore,

Adieu.

F. S.

LET-

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 53

LETTER XII.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

My dear FANNY,

I AM so violently provoked, at the insolent baseness of that abominable Miller, that I cannot find words to express my resentment. I do not think you seem sufficiently rejoiced at Lucy's escape, from such a monster. For my part, I am delighted at the thoughts of his being married to such a woman, as Miss Nelson.—May she render him just as miserable, as he deserves to be.—His greatest enemy could not wish him worse.

BUT there are more wretches in the world, than he; and Lucy is not without companions in affliction. The willow grows on purpose for our sex; and were it to be watered, only by the tears drawn from beautiful eyes, by the perfidy of men, it would need no other moisture. Poor lady Harriet! an accident has discovered the cause of her too frequent sighs.

YESTERDAY morning, after breakfast, when the gentlemen had retired to their separate

54 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

amusements, lady Harriet, miss Weston, and I, were in my dressing-room. Lady Harriet took up Prior's Poems, and was reading his Henry and Emma, to Fanny, and me, who were at work; when in rushed lady Ransford, in a riding-dress, and begged I would permit her to introduce a gentleman, an acquaintance of her's, whom she had accidentally met on the road, as she was coming to spend the day with me. She concluded, he was a particular friend, whom she had not seen, for a long time. I immediately consented; and said, I was sorry my lord was not at home, to receive the gentleman.

SHE ran out directly, and led in captain Barnard.—While she was presenting him to me, the book fell from lady Harriet's hand, and she sunk motionless upon the couch. As soon as the captain cast his eyes on her, he appeared almost in the same condition: the colour forsook his lips, and he could hardly breathe. Lady Ransford looked with a spiteful kind of astonishment, and cried out, What can all this mean! Is she subject to fits? Fanny, and I, were engaged in trying to recover lady Harriet, I began to fear, in vain.—Life seemed, for some minutes, absolutely fled.

—The

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 55

—The wretched captain looked the picture of despair.—The moment she opened her eyes, he bowed, left the room, mounted his horse, and rode off.

WE conveyed lady Harriet to her chamber, and laid her on the bed ;—when a plentiful shower of tears seemed to have relieved her. I left Fanny Weston with her, and returned to lady Ransford. She seemed in a violent passion, that the captain was gone—What had he to do with lady Harriet's faintings ? She was very sure it was only an air she gave herself. She thanked God, she was not subject to such tricks. She never fainted in her life, and was quite certain she never should, &c. &c.

I CONGRATULATED her on the goodness of her constitution ; said, lady Harriet's was extremely delicate, and that she had not been well, for some time. This did not satisfy her ; and she continued out-of humour at the captain's desertion, the whole day. Several times repeating, I do not suppose he ever saw her before ; of what consequence was her fainting, to him ? I encouraged her in this opinion, though far from believing it.

D 4

I SAID,

56 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

I SAID, his retiring was a mark of politeness, as the presence of a stranger, must increase the confusion we were in. Nothing that I said could pacify her. I therefore suffered her to mutter out her dissatisfaction, without replying, for the remainder of the time she staid, which was not long after dinner.—She said, she should be afraid to ride with only one servant, after it was dusk.

I NEVER was better pleased, with the departure of a guest. I longed to see poor Harriet, who had not left her room, and flew to her the moment lady Ransford was gone. She looked abashed, and held down her lovely eyes, which were yet bathed in tears, when I approached her;—but the tenderness with which I inquired her health, seemed to reassure her.

YOU are too good to me, my dear lady Woodville; such weakness as mine, scarcely deserves your compassion: and I can only presume to hope for it, by the most unbounded confidence, which I should long since have reposed in your friendly bosom, but that I thought it cruel, even for a moment, to interrupt that happiness which you so well deserve.

But

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 57

But as the accident, which happened this day, must convince you, that there is a secret sorrow, which preys upon my heart, I will readily acquaint you with the cause of it, lest the tenderness of your nature, should make you imagine me more wretched, than I really am.

YOU must suppose, my dear, said I, that your situation, this morning, alarmed me extremely; but I have long thought there was some secret source, for that soft melancholy, which you vainly endeavour to represent as constitutional. But do not let this remark make you think yourself under a necessity of disclosing your secrets to me. I am far from desiring to pry into them: but should rejoice at having it in my power to do any thing, which might alleviate your distress. And if my participation of your sorrow, can soothe it, but for a moment, it will more than repay me, for what I feel, in knowing that you are unhappy.

SHE said, she was not then capable of making the least return to my kindness, though perfectly sensible of it; but that, as soon as she was able, she would write out her short story, for me, and lady Straffon. She said,

58 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Lucy knew something of it, but not the whole ; and desired she might see it, as a kind of consolation, under her present circumstances.

As soon as I receive, I will send it to you. pray present my love to Lucy ; and tell her, I intreat her company at Woodfort, whenever she is able to travel. Change of air, and objects, will forward her recovery. Why cannot you, and the little ones, accompany her, and complete the wishes of,

Your affectionate,

E. WOODVILLE ?

LETTER

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 59

LETTER XHI.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

My dear Sister,

I THIS morning, received the inclosed, which has engaged my attention, ever since; I have but just time to send it to you, without the smallest comment; but, as it may remain longer in your hands, I shall expect it to be returned, with notes *variorum*.

I HAVE absented myself, from our family party, (which is indeed a charming one) except during dinner, this whole day; I shall return to it, with double gusto, from a certainty, that amiable as they who compose it are, in their manners, and persons, their hearts are still more valuable. Haste then, my dearest Fanny, and Lucy, to partake, and perfect, the most delightful society, in the world,

sincerely prays your

E. WOODVILLE.

The

60 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

The Memoir of *Lady* HARRIET HAN-
BURY.

As the strongest mark, of my sincerity and gratitude, to my dear lady Woodville, for all her kindness to me, I sit down to fulfil the voluntary promise I made, of acquainting her with the few events of a short life, whose duration has only been marked, by sorrow; and as, "to mention, is to suffer pain," I chose to save her gentle heart the uneasiness, of seeing the distress, which, the recollection of unhappy circumstances, must ever revive, where the sufferer is the relater. I must now, like all Biographers, step a little back, to give you some account of the authors of my being, and then proceed with a plain narrative, submitting my weaknesses, and follies, without the least reserve, to your friendly eye.

My father, was eldest son, to the earl of G—. During my grandfather's life, he became passionately in love, with my mother, who was a daughter of colonel Stanley's, and [reputed one of the greatest beauties, of that time. My father well knew it would be in vain,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 61

vain, to hope, for the earl's consent to his marrying, without a large fortune, let the merits of the lady be ever so great; as his estate was extremely involved, and that he had four children, by a second wife, unprovided for.

My mother's portion was only four thousand pounds, but her father, who considered her birth, beauty, and accomplishments, as full equivalents to any fortune, when he found the earl was not acquainted with my father's courtship, forbade his daughter ever to see her lover more, as his pride would not have suffered him to have matched her with a prince, clandestinely.

THE lovers, reduced to this unhappy situation, after much fruitless sorrow, had recourse to the usual alternative, and married, without consent, on either side. The affair, was not long kept secret, and the earl, whose rage was without bounds, accused the colonel of being privy to the marriage, and of drawing in his son—he also lavished every kind of abuse, upon my mother, and stopt the allowance he had, for some years, given to my father.

THE]

62 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

THE colonel, though highly offended with his daughter, resented the cruelty and injustice of the earl's behaviour towards her, and sent him a challenge.—The duel was prevented, by my father's address, but, the most implacable hatred ever remained, between the old gentlemen; which communicated itself to every branch of the families, except my father and mother, who were the most perfect patterns of conjugal tenderness.

NOTWITHSTANDING my father's increasing fondness for his lovely wife, the unhappy feuds, which she thought herself the occasion of, preyed on her tender mind, and, so much weakened her delicate frame, that, in giving me life, she lost her lown;—fatal exchange for her unhappy orphan! My father was quite distracted at her loss, and the colonel, who had been reconciled to them both, for some time, was obliged to restrain his own affliction, to endeavour to console my father, and engage him to preserve his life, by frequently presenting me before him.

“YES, he would then say, I will live, for
“the protection, of that only transcript of my
“angel Harriet. I will watch over her rising
“virtues,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 63

“virtues, and endeavour, to restore to the
“world, some part of that perfection, my
“cruel father has deprived it of.” For four
years, his fondness for me, *was* unabated, and
I appeared to be the sole object, of his atten-
tion, or regard.

ABOUT that æra, the earl wrote to him,
and a reconciliation soon ensued; the terms of
which were, that as my father had gratified
himself, by his first marriage, he should oblige
the earl, and serve his family, by a second.
My father, whose nature was gentle, was soon
induced to comply, and, as I believe his real
fondness for my mother, had rendered all wo-
men indifferent to him, the choice of his fu-
ture lady was intirely left to the earl, who,
you may suppose, would rate her value, only
by her fortune. My father paid his addresses,
in form, and even without the least degree of
liking, on either side, the match was con-
cluded.

THE perpetual scenes of discord, which
succeeded to this ill-suited marriage, are but
too public, and I have great reason to appre-
hend, that, to this constant source of domestic
misery, I owe the loss of my unhappy father.

The

64 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

The first cause of disgust, which my step-mother gave him, was her absolutely refusing to let me be brought into the house, politely adding, that she would not suffer a *beggar's brat*, to be brought up with her children, who were at least, intitled to a fortune, by their mother's side ; and, that those who had nothing, but their blood to boast of, should be bred humbly, to lower their pride. This one specimen is, I think, sufficient to give you a perfect idea, of my poor father's unhappiness, and I shall say nothing more, of one, who has the honour, to bear his name, and title.

I REMAINED at my grandfather's, and was his principal favourite. My father continued to see me, frequently, and, notwithstanding his family was increased, by the birth of a son, and two daughters, his fondness for me, appeared undiminished—but neither his lady, nor the earl, ever took the least notice of me—my father's sister, lady Woodville, was extremely kind to me, and, even pressed my grandfather to let me live with her, but he refused to part with the only joy he had on earth, and she died before him.

WHEN

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 65

WHEN I was about fourteen, I was deprived of my affectionate, and tender parent, the good old colonel.—Before he died, he recommended me, in the most affecting terms, to my father, who promised every thing in my favour, that he could desire; but, seemed offended, that the colonel should think it necessary, to plead, for his dearest, best loved child, the child of his affection, the child of his ever-adored, and lamented Harriet. Fully satisfied with these assurances, the good old man resigned his soul, in peace, leaving me all his personal fortune, which amounted to about six thousand pounds; his paternal estate being entailed, on a male heir.

LADY Anne Westrop, who was a distant relation of my mother's, invited me to live with her, and in the society of this agreeable woman, I began to recover my natural cheerfulness, which had been totally absorbed, by the grief I felt, for my grandfather's ill health, and death.—During a year, that we passed intirely at her seat in the country, I knew not one moment's uneasiness—my mind was like a peaceful ocean, whose every motion was uniformly gentle, without one ruffling breeze to disturb, or deform it; yet sufficiently

66 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

ently actuated, to prevent languor or disgust,
the stagnation of the soul.

How often have I looked back, with regret, upon this pleasing calm! which was, alas! too soon succeeded by impetuous storms, where all my peace was shipwrecked. About the end of this happy æra, captain Barnard came to pay a visit to his sister, lady Anne; he is youngest son to the earl of W—. He was designed for the navy, and his father was, at that time, soliciting a ship, which he soon obtained for him. I shall not take up your ladyship's time, by giving you an account of our childish courtship, but tell you, at once, that,

A mutual flame was quickly caught,
Was quickly too reveal'd,
For neither bosom lodg'd a wish,
Which virtue keeps conceal'd.

What happy hours of heart-felt bliss,
Did love on both bestow!
But bliss too mighty long to last,
Where fortune proves a foe."

IN

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 67

IN the midst of these truly Arcadian pleasures, the earl, my grandfather, died; which I can by no means say disturbed my happiness; but, alas! it was to be interrupted by a severer shock; for my father survived him, but eleven days; the six thousand pounds, which colonel Stanley, had bequeathed to me, was in my father's hands, his estate was all settled upon the issue of his second marriage, and his debts amounted to rather more, than his personal fortune; so that there remained not a shilling for me, even of my grandfather's legacy, without going to law with the countess, my step-mother, who had possessed herself of every thing my father left.

I GRIEVED only for his loss, that of my fortune appearing, then, of no consequence; my lover, seemed to redouble his tenderness for me, but thought, circumstanced as I then was, it would be prudent to conceal our passion, as it was highly probable his friends might oppose our union. I acquiesced in his opinion, and rested all my hopes of happiness, on him,—unworthy guardian of that sacred trust!

WHEN

68 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

WHEN the time for his leaving West-hill, arrived, I then discovered that I had never known sorrow, before; it was impossible to conceal my anguish, and lady Anne Westrop, who had taken great pains to comfort me for the death of my father, and imagined, not without reason, that my grief had subsided into a calm, and gentle melancholy, seemed astonished, at the violence of my affliction; but, I might have answered her, with the words of Helena, “ I think not on my father, “ and these great tears do grace his memory, “ more, than those I shed for him.”

HOWEVER, I thought it very lucky, that my late misfortune appeared a sufficient cause, for my present melancholy, which I indulged to such an excess, as soon affected my constitution, and I was ordered by my physician, to Bristol. Lady Anne, ever kind, and affectionate, towards me, accompanied me thither, and Mr. Westrop went up to London, to consult lawyers, about the recovery of my fortune.

THE frequency and tenderness, of captain Barnard's letters, contributed much more, to the restoration of my health, than all the waters

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 69

ters of those salubrious springs; and lady Anne expressed such sincere joy, at my recovery, that I, romantic as I was, thought myself bound in honour, to acquaint her with the real cause of it. I thought concealing any thing, from such a friend, was *acting a lye*, and, in the fulness of my gratitude, I poured forth all the secrets of my heart.

SHE heard me, with that sort of coldness, with which one listens to a twice-told tale, yet, at the same time, assured me, she had never suspected any attachment, between her brother and me; said she wished, for both our sakes, we could conquer our passion, for she was certain, it could only be productive of misery, to both.

I WAS equally picqued at her manner, and expression, and replied, with some warmth, that, as I considered myself under very great obligations to her, I would not entail misery on any part of her family, let my own fate be what it would. She applauded my resolution, with the same *sang froid*, with which she had heard my story, and I retired from her apartment, to my own, more humbled, and mortified, than I had ever been, in my life.

I PASSED

70 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

I PASSED a most restless, miserable night, sometimes resolving, from the highest generosity, to break with captain Barnard,—the next moment, repeating vows of everlasting love—but, at all events, I determined, to quit lady Anne; yet, whither should I go? where fly to? a wretched orphan, without friends, or fortune!

THE agitation of my mind, at length subsided, and towards morning, I fell into a profound slumber. As I slept much longer than usual, I found lady Anne's woman by my bedside, when I awoke, who said, she came from her lady, to inquire my health, and to request that I would go to her, immediately.

I OBEYED the summons, instantly, and, while I was hurrying on my cloaths, flattered myself, that she had relented of her unkindness, and wished again to restore me, to that sisterly affection, which she seemed so long to have felt for me, and yet to have lost, in one moment; possessed with this imagination, I ran, or rather flew, to her apartment; but, on opening the door, was surprized to see lord N——, who appeared very earnest in conversation with her ladyship.

THIS

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 71

THIS gentleman, had been very particular to me, ever since our residence at Bristol ; he was young, polite, and master of a large, independant fortune ; but, these advantages had made me rather decline, than encourage his acquaintance, lest the busy tongues of men, or rather women, might have pronounced him a lover—an epithet, which is, of all others, most hateful, to a delicate, pre-engaged heart.

ON my entrance, the conversation became general. Lady Anne affected to treat me with her usual tenderness, but, I too plainly saw, that she only affected it. After some little time, she withdrew, abruptly, and left me alone, with lord N——. A thousand disagreeable things rushed into my mind, at once, but above all, I feared a declaration of love, from his lordship, which, though I was determined to refuse, must have distressed me, extremely, as I could not, to the world, assign any justifiable cause, for my refusal.

I ROSE from my seat, with trepidation, and rang the bell, for breakfast. I hoped this would be a hint for his lordship to retire—on the contrary, he said, it was very fortunate for him,

72 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

him, that I had called for tea, as he had not touched any thing, but a glass of water, that day, and should have absolutely forgot that eating was necessary, if I had not reminded him of it; but since I had, he hoped I would allow him the honour of breakfasting with me.

I COOLLY bowed assent, and the moment the tea-table was removed, said I must retire, to put on my riding-dress, as I had promised to meet a lady on the Downs, I feared and should keep her waiting. Lord N—— saw my confusion, pitied, and relieved it, by saying he would not trespass farther, on my leisure, but hoped I would permit him the honour of paying me a visit, in the afternoon: he did not wait for my reply, and I thought myself infinitely obliged to him, for even postponing the embarrassment, in which I knew I should be too soon involved.

As soon as lady Anne and I were alone, after dinner, she congratulated me, with a serious air, on the important conquest I had made, enumerated the great advantages of such a match, and said, she was rejoiced to find, by the ease, and propriety of my behaviour, that the silly prepossession I had talked of,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 73

the night before, had not rendered me so romantically absurd, as to reject happiness, and lord N——, or to persist in embracing misery, and captain Barnard.

THOUGH I had, in some measure, prepared myself, to hear her speak on this subject, yet I could not avoid feeling the utmost surprize, at her want of delicacy, in mentioning the man whom I professed to love, at the same instant, that she approved my accepting of another.

As soon as I recovered myself, I told her that I was neither intitled to her congratulation, or approbation, as lord N—— had never said any thing upon such a subject, to me, and that I hoped he never would, as I should be very sorry, to give him the mortification of a denial; but, at the same time, that I fled from what *she* called happiness, I hoped I should find, what I thought so, in the consciousness of having acted right; for though I never could divest myself, of the tenderest attachment, to captain Barnard, yet I could sacrifice my hopes of any future connection with him, to his advantage, and her desire.

74 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

LADY Anne took me at my word, praised my generosity, and intreated I would take time to consider, before I refused lord N——. I assured her, that delay was unnecessary; and as I had a very high esteem for his lordship, and was sincerely grateful, for the honour he intended me, I could not think of trifling with his peace, or meanly accepting a heart, because set in gold, when it was absolutely impossible for me to make the only return, which such a valuable present deserved. She called me, dear, romantic, generous girl; said she had no doubt, but time, and reason, would conquer my childish passion, and that she should rejoice to see me happy, with some worthy man; but, still intreated me, not to act precipitately, with regard to lord N——, as she feared I might never have such another offer.

THIS kind of conversation, lasted till lord N—— came to visit us, and I now wished for his making that declaration, I so much dreaded, in the morning. I was determined, on the conduct I should pursue towards him, and secretly triumphed, in the sacrifice I should make, to my truly disinterested love for captain Barnard. However, her ladyship took care,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 75

care that we should not so immediately come to an explanation; for she never left us, the whole evening. Lord N—— appeared to be chagrined; and I was also extremely mortified that the affair was not brought to a conclusion.

THE next day, I received a letter, from Mr. Westrop, informing me, that my step-mother had consented to give me four thousand pounds, rather than stand a law suit for the six, which my grandfather left me. In consideration of this sum, I was to relinquish all farther claim, to my father's fortune, and to receive it as a present, from her bounty. These terms I thought extremely hard; but to attempt carrying on an expensive suit, without money, appeared impracticable. It is true, Mr. Westrop, in the most friendly manner, offered to advance any sum I might have occasion for; but I already felt the *weight* of my obligation to lady Anne, and determined not to increase *the load*. I, therefore, complied with these severe conditions: but as I was not of age, Mr. Westrop became security, for my part of the contract; and the interest of this splendid sum, was allowed for my maintenance.

76 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

ON this occasion, lady Anne behaved with the utmost kindness towards me; begged I would consider her as my sister, and never think of quitting her house, till I went to one of my own. She made me several valuable presents, which I received with the utmost reluctance; yet could not refuse, as her manner of bestowing them, was peculiarly polite, and tender. In short, she did every thing in her power, to conciliate that true esteem, and affection, which her conduct, with regard to captain Barnard, had, for a while, restrained.

LORD N—soon found an opportunity, to disclose his passion to me; and I, as quickly, put an end to all his hopes. He thanked me for the generous frankness of my conduct, and earnestly intreated to be admitted to see me as a friend, though I had denied him as a lover. I readily consented to his request, and have ever found him a most amiable, and worthy man.

I HAD not received a letter from captain Barnard, for near a month.—He was stationed in the Mediterranean: and though determined, as soon as he returned to England, to take an everlasting leave of him, I grew impatient at his

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 77

his silence, and longed to return to Westhill, to retrace those paths we had trod together, and woo sweet echo to repeat his name. I knew lady Anne received foreign letters, frequently, some of which I supposed were from captain Barnard; but as she was silent, on the subject of them, I did not think it proper to appear inquisitive; and some weeks elapsed, without suffering that name to pass my lips, which was but too deeply engraved, on my heart.

AT length, the time for our departure, came, and we arrived at Westhill.—The morning after, I rose, very early, in order to indulge the fond idea of revisiting those woods, and lawns, where I had spent so many happy hours.—I did not imagine any of the family were stirring, and went softly into lady Anne's dressing-room, where all the English poets lay, to take a book with me into the gardens. I started, at finding her there. Her surprize at seeing me, equalled mine: but quickly recovering herself, she talked of the fineness of the morning, which she said had tempted her to leave her bed, so soon; but that finding the dew was not off the grass, she had sat down to write letters.

78 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

A PROPOS, said she; I have had one in my possession for you, these ten days; but as I did not know whether the contents might be perfectly agreeable to you, I chose to defer delivering it, till we were quite free from observers. I flatter myself, madam, said I, that your precaution was unnecessary, if, as I apprehend, the letter comes from captain Barnard. Lady Anne replied, Do not be too sanguine, my dear; we feel our disappointments, in proportion to our expectations. True, madam, I returned; but as the height of mine, at present, extends only to knowing that your brother is well, and happy, do not protract my anxiety, on that account, but be so good to let me have my letter.

SHE then presented it to me, saying, I believe you had better retire to your own apartment, before you read it. I willingly obeyed: but though all this preparation was sufficient to alarm me, yet at the sight of those dear, well known characters, I forgot all that lady Anne had said, and broke the seal with the highest transport. But before I had read half the following lines, I, in reality, suffered the transformation, which Ovid feigned for Niobe: my limbs were petrified; nor was there the least

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 79

least sign of life, or motion, remaining in me,
but my flowing tears.

To Lady HARRIET HANBURY.

“MADAM,

“THE ingratitude, and unkindness, of
“your behaviour towards me, deserve such
“reproaches, as I am incapable of making, to
“a person I once truly loved. I ought to be
“thankful for your having cured me of that
“folly; but the manner of your doing it,
“takes away the merit of the obligation.

“UNWORTHY Harriet! you might have
“ceased to love, without betraying, and ex-
“posing the wretch, who doated on you.
“lord N——’s superior rank, and fortune,
“were temptations, I scarce could hope you
“should withstand. But why, ingrate!
“should you despise, and ridicule the fond-
“ness, of that heart,—where, though you
“have planted daggers, there still remains
“the warmest wishes, for your future happi-
“ness.

“IT is now above two months, since I
“have heard from you. This cruel, this

86 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ alarming silence, filled my fond bosom with
“ the tenderest sorrow. I had a thousand
“ fears for my loved Harriet. I feared some
“ fatal accident might have befallen her. I
“ feared every thing that could befall, except
“ her breach of vows! The fidelity of my
“ own heart, prevented that suspicion.

“ BUT I have done, for ever, on this
“ subject; nor will I longer interrupt your
“ felicity, than to intreat, as my last re-
“ quest, if you have thought my letters worth
“ preserving, that you will immediately de-
“ liver them, to my sister. If ever I return to
“ England, and you desire it, I will restore
“ your's, dear as they once were to my faith-
“ ful heart, which wants not memento's of
“ the faithless Harriet.

“ I HAVE got another ship, and shall use
“ all my interest, to prevent my returning to
“ England.—Amidst all the perils, to which
“ my situation daily exposed me, I wished to
“ preserve my life, for your sake, only; but
“ your perfidy has now rendered it of as little
“ value to me, as it ever was to you: and to
“ die nobly in the service of my country, is,
“ at present, the most earnest wish of,

“ The unfortunate,

“ WM. BARNARD.”

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 81

I HAD, remained, for some hours, in the situation I have already described, when lady Anne sent her woman, to call me to breakfast. On finding my eyes fixed, and my whole frame immoveable, Mrs. Atkins screamed so loud, that lady Anne, and Mr. Westrop, ran into my dressing-room. I was immediately put into bed, and every care was taken for my recovery. A slow fever ensued, which I daily hoped would terminate my life, and misery; but it pleased Providence that I should be reserved, for greater woes.

As soon as I was capable of reasoning, I found captain Barnard had been imposed upon, and felt even more for his sufferings, than my own.—But who could have deceived him? it must be lady Anne. But as I was not in a situation to resent such cruelty, I thought it most prudent to acquiesce, in silence, and wait till time, the great expounder of mysteries, should clear my innocence. She frequently observed, that as I was determined to break with him, it would be better to let him remain in his error, than to come to an explanation, that could answer no end, as we were to part, for ever. To this I could, by no means, agree. But, alas! it was not in my

82 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

power to oppose her pleasure. I neither knew the name of his ship, nor his place of destination; and I continued, for near twelve months, a prey to the most cruel suspense.

AT this time, lady Anne, and Mr. Westrop, purposed making the petit tour, and insisted on my accompanying them.—I gladly accepted the offer; for I might truly say, “I had such
“ perpetual source of disquiet, in my own
“ breast, that rest was grown painful to me,
“ and a state of agitation, only, could afford
“ me ease, by rescuing me, as it were, from
“ myself.”

THOUGH we spent a month, in London, to wait for the conclusion of the peace, I knew not where to make any inquiry after captain Barnard; nor had I a friend, to whom I could venture to repeat his name; and I set out for Paris, much more inclined to enter into the most gloomy solitude, than to partake of the pleasures of that gay city.

THERE I became acquainted with lord Woodville, and there I also met Mrs. Bolton, who was nearly related to me, by my mother.—We had been acquainted, from our infancy,
and

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 83

and had a real friendship for each other; but her living in Ireland, where her husband had a very large fortune, had prevented our meeting, for three years before. She was in a very declining state of health, and was going to Montpelier, on that account, when Mr. Bolton was obliged to set out for Ireland, on the death of a near relation.

As lady Anne was constantly engaged in the grande monde, I spent much of my time with Mrs. Bolton, and with real sorrow saw that amiable woman growing worse, every day.—Her physicians, at length, had her removed, to Fontainbleau.—Just then, lady Anne grew weary of Paris, and resolved to pursue her route. Poor Mrs. Bolton shed a flood of tears, when I talked of quitting Paris, and intreated me not to leave her “ a helpless stranger in a foreign land.” Even her own maid, had married one of the *gens d’armes*, and left her, so that she had not a creature about her, that had the least regard, or tenderness, for her. She said, a few days would put an end to the arduous task she required from my friendship, that of closing her dying eyes: but that, if Mr. Bolton should return, before that happened, her carriage,

24 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

and servants, should convey me to lady Anne, or wherever I desired.

THERE was no resisting her importunities; and lady Anne, though dissatisfied at my stay, applauded the nobleness of my friendship, and took a very affectionate leave of me. I saw her get into her carriage, with sincere regret. I considered myself, as torn from one who had been the friend, and protectress of my youth. Her cruelty was forgot; and every act of kindness she had ever shewn me, returned with double force, into my memory; and my heart and eyes overflowed, with grateful tenderness,

I WAS waiting, in this situation of mind; for Mrs. Bolton's chariot, to carry me to Fontainebleau, when captain Barnard entered the room! I will not pretend to describe the emotions of my heart;—in short, they were too strong for my reason, and suspended all its powers.—Never sure was such a meeting! The extremes of love, surprize, resentment, joy, all operated on me,

He was all penitence, and love; kneeled at my feet, and bathed my hand with tears; pleaded

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 85

pleaded the violence of his distracted love, in excuse for the cruel letter he had wrote, when he believed me false; and uttered the most solemn vows, that if I would again receive his heart, which never had strayed, one moment, from me, no power on earth, should ever part us more: but if I refused to accept his love, he would instantly give up the command of his ship, and retire to some part of the world, where he should never be heard of.

I WILL frankly confess, that all my tenderness for this unworthy man, returned; and I even thought I loved him better, than I had ever done, before. He was then of age, and master of himself: there remained, therefore, nothing to oppose *our* wishes, for I own them mutual, but the obligations I was under, and the voluntary promise I had made, to lady Anne. This objection he treated as romantic; but said, he would gratify my delicacy, in this particular; and engaged to obtain her free consent.

He attended me to Fontainebleau, and visited me there, every day, during two months, that my amiable friend continued to languish.—

As

86 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

At the end of that time, she was released, and left me in sincere affliction. Mr. Bolton returned, a few days before her death; and, some time after, made me a present of part of her jewels, to the amount of two thousand pounds.—I would have declined so valuable a gift; but it was my dear Mrs. Bolton's dying request, that I should have them.

AT captain Barnard's earnest intreaty, I returned to Paris, where he still continued to solicit our marriage, and I to refuse, till he had fulfilled his promise, with regard to lady Anne.—At length, he extorted one from me, that even her opposing it, should not prevent our union; and, in an oblique manner, confessed, that she had been the cause of that letter, which had given me so much pain, by her misrepresentation of my conduct at Bristol. He that can please, is certain to persuade; and I, at last, acquiesced in his request.

HE would not hear of my returning to England, till we were married. I had no parent's consent to ask, and he had wrote to the chaplain of his ship, to come and marry us. Seemingly possessed with the tenderest passion, that ever warmed a human heart, he

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 87

set out for Aix la Chapelle, where we supposed lady Anne to be; but, unluckily, she had left it, two days before captain Barnard arrived, and was then returning to England. Thither the captain followed. I was extremely concerned at his disappointment; but it was only on account of the additional trouble, and fatigue, he was to undergo.

HE wrote to me, every post; nay, I was sometimes so happy, as to receive two or three letters, wrote at different times of the same day, filled with the language of love, with fond complaints of absence, and vows never to leave me more.

HOWEVER, blinded as I was by my own passion, I could not help perceiving, that when he had been some time in England, the stile of his letters began to change, though he continued still to complain of the cruel necessity that detained him; but not in that charming, plaintive stile, which used, at once, to soften, and delight my heart.

THREE months passed away, in this manner, during which time, I received a cold, but civil letter, from lady Anne, congratulating
me

28 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

me on the constancy of my lover, and thanking me for the needless compliment I had paid her, as she was perfectly convinced we were too much in love, to follow any person's advice, but our own.—Notwithstanding this, she very sincerely wished my happiness, whether I should, or should not become her sister.

As I found captain Barnard's return was still protracted, by his father's ill health, and many other reasons, that did not appear to me sufficient, I began to be uneasy at my situation.—A single woman, without friends, or relations, in such a place as Paris, was, by no means, in an eligible state.—I had some acquaintance, and those of distinction, who received me, on lady Anne's account, without inquiring into the motives of my stay: but I felt a consciousness, that their civilities were more the effect of politeness, than esteem: which rendered me unhappy; and I wrote to captain Barnard, requesting his permission to return to England, if he did not intend to come to Paris, immediately.

My letter lay sealed, and directed, on my dressing-table, when lord N—— came to make
me.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 89

me a visit ; and casting his eyes on the letter, said, I might spare myself the trouble of sending it to the post-office, as he had, that moment, met captain Barnard, in a very fine equipage. My heart sunk in me, at this news. — Yet I still flattered myself, that lord N— might mistake some other person for him, and was earnest in persuading his lordship, that he was deceived, when the captain's servant brought me the following card.

“ IF lady Harriet H—, will be at home,
“ and alone, this evening, captain Barnard
“ will, if agreeable, do himself the honour
“ of waiting on her, at six o'clock.”

THE surprize I had been in before, was augmented, by this extraordinary message. I, however, sent word I should be glad to see him ; and passed the intermediate hours in endeavouring to prepare myself, for that fatal change, which was already but too visible, but which I was utterly unable to account for.

AT the appointed time, he came, and endeavoured to assume a sort of formal tenderness, accompanied with an air of gravity, and mystery.

90 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

mystery. I could not long endure such a cruel state of suspense, and pressed to know, what it was that affected him? he told me, he was the most miserable man breathing, that all his schemes of happiness were blasted, but that he never could have resolution to tell me, why they were so—called me, dear, suffering angel! kissed my hand, and wept.—

I CANNOT describe the emotion of my heart; I longed, yet feared, to know what all this meant; and, at length, told him, that if he did not wish to make me extremely unhappy, he would explain this enigma. He said, he had great reason to fear, that satisfying my inquiries, would render me, yet more wretched, even than doubt could do; and if the secret could be kept, for ever, from me, he would die, rather than reveal it. But I must know it, and he who was a sharer in the misfortune, would tell it, with most tenderness.

HE then conjured me, to summon all the love I ever had for him, that it might incline me, to pity, and pardon a wretch, that had undone himself! in short, he told me, that his friends had prevailed on him, to marry Miss

S—.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 91

S—, whom he unfortunately met, at Aix la Chapelle, and accompanied to London—that at the moment he received her hand, the icy one of death, would have been more welcome; that his heart did, and ever should, adore me, and only me; and that he lived for me, and me, only.

HE had knelt by my side, while he told this fatal story, and when he finished it, wept extremely. To his amazement, not one sigh, or tear, escaped me. I rose immediately, and wished him joy, then rung the bell, to order my chariot; he remained immoveable, I begged he would rise, before the servant entered—he obeyed; but implored me not to leave him; said it was impossible, that I could really be so indifferent, as I appeared; that he was prepared to meet my anger, or my sorrow, but could not bear contempt.

I TOLD him, that was, at present, my predominant sentiment, and the sooner he retired from it, and put an end to this interview, the better, and which I would take care should be our last. He vowed he would never leave the spot, where he again prostrated himself, till I pronounced his pardon. I told him this was adding insult,

92 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

sult, to injury, but since he would not quit my apartment, I should.

I THREW myself into my carriage, and suffered myself to be carried to the marchioness de St. Aumont's—there I met lord Woodville, and lord N——; who both remarked, that I looked extremely ill, and advised me to leave the assembly, and return home. And I soon found myself so really so, that I was obliged to follow their advice.

I WENT immediately to bed, without speaking a syllable, even to my maid, who observing so sudden a change in my manners and appearance, sat up in my dressing-room. The heroism of my conduct, towards captain Barnard, had flattered my pride, and kept up my spirits, while he was present, but I was no sooner alone, than I felt all the weight of my misfortunes; and the agitation, and distraction of my mind, threw me into convulsions. My maid had immediate help for me, but all the art of the best physicians in Paris, could not restore my senses, for fifteen days—happy interval! delightful recess, from agonizing sorrow.

AT

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 93

AT length, their cruel kindness triumphed, so far, as to restore my reason—but, good God! in what a shattered plight, did it return! and to what a poor, defaced, and wretched habitation? my disorder was generally believed to be a malignant fever, but, doctor L—, who understood the maladies of the mind, as well as body, and was acquainted with my attachment to captain Barnard, contributed to the recovery of the latter, by administering consolation to the former, much more, than all the art of medicine could have done. I soon discharged all my physicians, but him, who only knew the source of my complaint; and to his skill, and tenderness, am I indebted, for the preservation of this wretched being.

DURING my illness, lord Woodville, and lord N—, behaved like brothers to me—they both visited me daily, and endeavoured, but in vain, and unknowing of the cause, to dissipate that melancholy, which will for ever prey upon my heart. My mind was so much weakened, that I determined to go into a convent, and flattered myself, that in that calm retirement, I should find peace, and rest. I fancied I might there retain the tenets of my
own

94 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

own religion, only conforming, externally, to theirs.

I COMMUNICATED my project to doctor L—, who soon convinced me, that peace dwells not in a cloister, but that even those holy retreats, are filled with vain wishes, and tumultuous passions; and that it would be making a mockery of all religion, to pretend to embrace theirs, unless I could do it, sincerely.

WHILE I remained in a very weak, and languishing condition, a gentleman called frequently to inquire my health; but as he refused to leave his name, I guessed it was some person sent by captain Barnard, and was therefore not the least inquisitive about him. At length he desired to be admitted to see me, saying, he had something of importance, to communicate.

I CONSENTED; and after the common civilities were over, he took a packet out of his pocket, and presenting it to me, said he hoped that would be an acceptable present. It was directed, in an unknown hand; but as I hesi-

hesitated about receiving it, he said I had nothing to fear, from the contents, and he would call for my answer, the next day; and instantly left the room.

THE packet contained a long letter, from captain Barnard, filled with vain excuses for his falsehood, and passionate intreaties that I would again suffer him to plead his pardon, at my feet—he expressed the most poignant sorrow for my illness, and begged I would at least permit him to repair the injuries he had done me, as far as it was possible, by accepting an unlimited power over that fortune, to which he had sacrificed his love, honour, and happiness; and as a proof of my forgiveness, requested I would receive an inclosed bill, for five hundred pounds; but if my pride should still reject his penitence, he desired I would return his letters, by the gentleman that was the bearer of that.

THIS fresh insult roused all my resentment against him, and I passed a restless night, counting the clock, and with impatience, waiting for the hour when I should restore his insolent present, with the scorn it merited.

AT

96 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

AT length, his ambassador arrived, and either was, or seemed to be surprized, when I acquainted him with the purport of the letter he had brought me; and made many apologies for having unwittingly offended—said the affair between captain Barnard and me, had been represented in a very different light to him; that he understood there had been a slight quarrel between us, and that the letter he brought, was to be the means of reconciliation.

CRUEL Barnard, merciless man! was it not enough to make me wretched! why should he endeavour to make me infamous, also! I returned the note, and put the letter which had inclosed it, into the fire. As to those I had formerly received from captain Barnard, I told his friend I would readily part with them, when he should have restored mine; but as I had no reason to have the least reliance on his word, I would not give them out of my possession, on any other terms. He applauded my resolution, and retired.

I LONGED, impatiently, to leave Paris, and fancied I should recover my peace, by quitting the

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 97

the scene of my unhappiness—I was obliged to part with some of the jewels, which Mrs. Bolton had left me, to defray the expences of my illness, and journey ; and in a state of the lowest weakness, both of mind, and body, I returned to London.

ON my arrival, I found that a maiden aunt of my father's, who had never taken the least notice of me, during her life, had bequeathed me her whole fortune, ten thousand pounds, merely because I was her namesake, and unprovided for, by my father. This was a very happy addition to my confined circumstances ; but I was incapable of joy, and continued to live like a recluse, till lord Woodville's return to England.— He soon found me out, and did me the honour to present me to lady Straffon, and his lovely Emily.

IN this charming society, I began to recover my tranquillity, and flattered myself that it was well nigh established, till the unlucky accident, which brought captain Barnard to my sight, convinced me, that there is no cure, for ill-fated love ; since neither the

98 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

cruelty I have experienced, nor time itself, have yet been able to conquer it.

I WILL not now, my dear lady Woodville, take up more of your time, by apologizing for the weakness of my conduct, through this unhappy affair; for

“ With thee, I scorn the low constraint of art,
“ And boast the graceful weakness of my heart.”

LET-

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 99

L E T T E R X I V .

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

I HAVE a thousand thanks to give my dear Emily, for the pleasing, though melancholy entertainment, which lady Harriet's history has afforded me.—When I was very young, I used to be surprized that so many tragedies, and novels, were founded on the perfidy of men: but I have, for some years past, been perfectly convinced, that most of the miseries in this life, owe their being to that fatal source. And were there but a window in every fair bosom, in the cities of London, and Westminster, we should discover numberless hidden traces of the barbarous triumphs, of those doughty “Heroes, famous and renowned, for wronging innocence, and “breaking vows:” and among this detestable corps, I think captain Barnard might lead the van, and Sir James Miller bring up the rear.

You may see, by this disposition, that I think worse of the captain, than the baronet, as I think lady Harriet much more unhappy, than Lucy. However, I sincerely hope they

100 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

may both surmount their afflictions : for time, and reason, can do more, in these cases, than the sufferers are willing to allow. They are patients that do not wish to be cured ; and find a degree of pleasure, in indulging their malady.

I AM of opinion, that when disappointed love subsides into a calm, and gentle melancholy, its sensations may, not only be pleasing, to the persons that feel it, but render them more amiable, than they would otherwise be, by giving a peculiar softness, both to their form and manners. I think I should be more apt to fall in love, with a person so circumstanced, than with one who had never felt *la belle passion*.

I HAVE great pleasure in telling you, that Lucy daily gains strength, both of mind, and body ; and I, by no means, despair of a perfect cure. The most favourable symptom is, her not having mentioned Sir James, these two days ; yet have I not once restrained her on the subject, as she has lately spoke of him with great calmness. I have not yet shewn her lady Harriet's memoir.—Tenderness, like sorrow,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 101

forrow, is contagious; and the similitude of their situations, might call forth tears, which, though set down to the account of friendship, would certainly flow from her own sympathy.

IT is utterly impossible for me to have the pleasure of visiting Woodfort, this summer.—I expect Sir John, in a very few days.—As soon as he arrives, we shall go into Essex.—I do not think Lucy sufficiently recovered, to quit her nurse, as she calls me.—My little Emily, and Edward, are quite well, and surprizingly grown, since their illness.

I LONG to know what became of captain Barnard, the day he left you; and what connexion he could have, with lady Ransford; who, from your account, seems not to be one of those, who were born to weep over the willow.

I SUPPOSE you will soon set out, for York.—The lovely marchioness is to be there.—Is lady Lawson to be of your party? I could wish she were; as, I fear, my dear Emily may not be sufficiently attentive, to her
present

102 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

present situation.—Let me entreat you not to ride, and to dance, but little. My true love attends your lord; and, with good wishes to all your party, I am, affectionately,

your's,

F. STRAFFON.

LETTER

L E T T E R X V .

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

I AM not half satisfied with my dear Fanny's *no comment*, on lady Harriet's affecting story.—By making the case general, you seem inclined to lessen the calamity.—But a plague is a plague, though ten thousand, or only one thousand, die of it; and, by extending its dominion you increase the fatality,* without abating our compassion for particular sufferers.

AGAIN, and again, I say, what a blessed, happy creature, is your Emily! Had my dear lord, after gaining, trifled with my heart, his triumph would soon have been complete; for I really think the first wound must have subdued it. But he, who has penetration enough, to see the softness of my nature, has also generosity sufficient, to prevent my very wishes; and seems to have no fear, but want of power to gratify them. This is a theme, on which my grateful heart could dwell, for ever: but, not to tire you, I shall change the subject.

I FIND lord Seymour vastly averſe, to our going to York.—He has taken ſo much pains to diſſuade me from it, that if I had not promiſed Fanny Weſton, and Sir James Thornton, whoſe hearts are ſet on going, I ſhould find great pleaſure in ſacrificing my own inclination, to his lordſhip.—Yet he gives no ſolid reaſon, for our declining this party.—I perceive that *my lord* looks grave, when the ſubject is mentioned; of courſe, it is immediately dropped: and, I find, the boys and girls, will be conquerors.—Even the grave lady Harriet, and Mr. Ransford, ſeemed to be alarmed, while the matter appeared doubtful.

I THINK I have as little curioſity, as any of my ſex, yet I confeſs myſelf anxious to know lord Seymour's motive.—He is a man of ſuch excellent underſtanding, and true politeneſs, that I am aſtoniſhed at his thinking differently, even upon this trifling ſubject, from *my lord*! But avaunt! thou fiſt female vice, curioſity! I will not ſuffer thee to harbour, one moment longer, in my breaſt, thou inhospitable tenant! diſturber of the peaceful manſion that receives thee!

LADY

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 105

LADY Lawson will not accompany us, to York : she has been confined to her chamber, for some days, with a fever on her spirits. A young lady, whom she took into her house a distressed orphan, five years ago, and treated with the utmost tenderness, has just left her. This is unlucky, as she is ill, and alone. Sir William set out, for London, yesterday, without calling upon us.

THE moment I have quitted one dear sister, I shall fly to the other, and spend as much time, as I possibly can, with her. Should she continue ill, it will prevent my going to York. I shall only be sorry for the occasion, for I have lost all relish for the party.

I KNOW not what became of captain Barnard, the day he left us ; but, I hear, he is a constant visitor, at Ransford-Hall.—The old knight is laid up, in the gout ; and her ladyship acts in the double capacity, of master, and mistress, of the family.

I HOPE Sir John is, by this time, returned to you, full of love, and joy, and admiration,

106 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

at your amazing, and successful prowess, with regard to his children; and that you are all as happy, as you deserve, and I wish.

Amen, and adieu.

E. WOODVILLE.

A thousand loves to Lucy.

LET-

L E T T E R XVI.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFORD.

My dear FANNY,

AS I have been used, from my infancy, to your tender participation of all my pains, and pleasures, I could not resist my inclination of sending you the inclosed, which afforded me the most charming *melange* of both, that I have ever met with. I am proud, and pleased, that the writer was a woman; but cannot help lamenting, that such noble sentiments, such an elegant turn of mind, and above all, such tender sensibility, should be buried in a cloister.

Now for the means, by which I obtained this treasure.—Yesterday evening, after tea, the conversation turned on the subject of letter-writing. Lord Seymour advanced, and was seconded by *my lord*, that ladies, in general, wrote better, in the epistolary stile, than men.—As I looked upon such a declaration, rather as a compliment paid to the present company, than their real sentiments, I took up the argument: and though they men-

tioned several instances of charming female scribes, all of whom I admire, as much as they, yet would I not allow the merit general : —for those very persons, whom they quoted, are, or ought to be, as much distinguished from the rest of their sex, for their superior talents, as lady C——, or the duchess of of H——, for their uncommon beauty.

LORD Seymour politely called me an heretic, against self-conviction ; said, he had observed my frequent use of the pen, and was persuaded, that no person, with half my understanding, was ever fond of writing, who was not conscious of writing well. I told his lordship if the conversation became particular, there must be an end of the general argument. He bowed, and went on with repeating some passages, from female letters, which did honour to his taste, and with which we were all charmed.

HE then told us, that he had a letter in his pocket, which he looked upon to be the *chef d'œuvre* of female eloquence ; that he had found it, as he was, one morning, taking a solitary walk, in the Tuilleries ; that he would permit me to read it, provided I would candidly
give

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 109

give him my opinion, whether I thought any man living, could dictate such a letter. On my promising to be sincere, he took it out of his pocket-book, presented it to me, with a trembling hand, and left the room.

WHEN we met, at supper, I was lavish in its praise, and declared, that I doubted whether even Rousseau, could have wrote more tenderly. He seemed delighted at my conversion, and immediately complied with my request, to suffer me to take a copy of it, for you, and you, only.

I IMPATIENTLY long to know something more of the lady's history.—I cannot be persuaded, that it was mere accident, which put it into lord Seymour's hands.—But I will not detain you from the perusal of it, by my vague conjectures.—I shall, however, satisfy your curiosity, in a more material point, by letting you know lady Lawson is better.—I am to dine with her, *tête à tête*, to-morrow.

I SHALL claim great merit, for this volunteer. I hope Lucy continues well. I earnestly wish to know what apology you have made, for that worthless

110 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

worthless ideot, Sir James Miller, to Sir John.
Pray write very soon, a very long letter, to
Your's, very sincerely,

E. WOODVILLE.

THE LETTER.

“ AFTER a conflict of four months,
“ the mildest moment of which sad time,
“ was infinitely more painful, than that
“ which shall separate this feeble frame from
“ its perturbed spirit, I sit down to bid an
“ everlasting adieu, to him, who was far
“ dearer than the first, and long maintained
“ the scale in equal balance, with the latter.
“ Did I say *was*? alas! he is, and ever
“ will be, dearer, than my life! which I
“ would sacrifice, a thousand times, rather
“ than wound his heart, as now I must.

“ UNHAPPY Henry! what pangs, what
“ anguish, will now rend thy bosom, when
“ thou shalt be convinced, thou never hadst
“ a rival, in thy Charlotte's love! Even hea-
“ ven itself, yielded its claim to thee; and
“ my fond heart adored the Maker, in his
“ most perfect work, thy charming self!
“ Such

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 111

“ Such, in thy Charlotte’s eyes, didst thou appear,
“ pear, till thy relentless jealousy pursued,
“ and would have robbed of life—no rival,
“ Henry! but thy Charlotte’s brother!

“ How will amazement strike thee! My
“ sad heart bleeds for thine. Involved in
“ mystery, and misery, from my birth, this
“ truth could not have reached you, sooner;
“ nor could I possibly reveal the secret, and
“ brand with cruelty, and guilt, the authors
“ of my wretched being.

“ RECALL the fatal evening to your mind,
“ when that accursed jealousy infused its
“ venom first into your bosom—what pains
“ did I not take to counteract the poison!
“ how was the innocent young man astonished,
“ at your behaviour! remember the last
“ words I ever uttered to you.—*My dearest*
“ *Henry, let not appearances disturb your mind,*
“ *I can, and will, account for every action of*
“ *my life, to you—let your servant attend, at*
“ *the grate, to-morrow, for a letter from me,*
“ *and you shall be fully satisfied.*”

“ Ah! Henry, how could you doubt her
“ truth, who never yet deceived you! by

112 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ what you now must feel, judge what I felt;
“ when word was brought me, you had killed
“ my brother! that he survives, for your
“ sake, and my own, I bow my heart to
“ heaven. Ah! what uncommon misery were
“ mine, were I compelled to hate you! No,
“ Henry, I am not so wretched; I may love
“ you still, without a crime; most truly love
“ you; and every prayer that I address to
“ Heaven, may waft petitions for your true
“ felicity!

“ To-morrow, I renounce the world; vain
“ ceremony! Alas! I have renounced my
“ Henry, before.—This is my last adieu.—
“ May every saint, and angel, bless, protect,
“ and guide you, to that heaven, where we
“ may, once more, hope to meet!—Till then,
“ farewell, for ever——”

L E T T E R XVII.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

I AM vastly obliged to my dear Emily, for her two last letters—her volunteer was delightful—that angelic nun has almost broke my heart—it is impossible she can be happy, in a cloister, and I very much doubt, whether those fine feelings, which she seems to have, would not have rendered her rather more miserable, had she remained in the world. May she soon arrive at that place, where the highest sensibility must be productive of the highest happiness!

You will, perhaps, think me cruel, for wishing her death; but indeed, my dear sister, there is scarce a man living, who could deserve such a heart as hers; not even lord Seymour, to whom I believe it devoted. If I read aright, I am truly sorry for his misfortune; he has sustained an irreparable loss.

I DARE say your lord is acquainted with the whole story; and as I am persuaded that lord Seymour is incapable of a base, or mean action,

action, he may, perhaps, be prevailed on, to satisfy your curiosity—but if he once declines it, press him no farther. As you value his peace, and your own, never lay him under the painful necessity, of refusing any thing, to the woman he loves; nor let him ever see you have a wish ungratified. Believe me, Emily, more women lose their husbands hearts, by what they call carrying their point, and teizing a good-natured man into compliance, than any other way.

THE first part of this letter, like the Gazette, has been devoted to foreign affairs; now for domestic.—Sir John returned, last week, in perfect health and spirits, from Paris. I did not suffer the children to appear, till I acquainted him with my bold undertaking—at first he looked surprized, and terrified; but immediately recollecting himself, said, that from his Fanny's countenance, he was certain our joint treasure must be safe. At that instant, the little animals flew into his arms; I cannot describe the charming scene, but it was, as you say, all “love, “and joy, and admiration.”

LUCY

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 115

LUCY came next; she had summoned all her spirits, to meet her brother, but in spite of all her resolution, a wayward tear stole down her lovely cheek. To our mutual surprise Sir John took not the least notice, of her soft confusion, nor asked a single question, about Sir James Miller. Lucy was vastly happy, at his seeming inattention; but it alarmed me, much more, than if he had spoken upon the subject.

A LITTLE time after, he withdrew into his closet, and wrote a letter—his servant returned, as we were sitting down to dinner, and told him the gentleman was not at home. During our meal, I felt the utmost anxiety, but durst not speak. Lucy was the exact resemblance of Shakespear's patience on a monument, "smiling in grief." Sir John appeared to be perfectly at ease, chearful, and lively.

I OBSERVED to him, that he talked much, and eat little. He pressed my hand, with unaffected tenderness, and said the joy he felt at seeing us all, had quite absorbed any thought of himself, but that nature would
soon

116 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

soon return to its old bent; and bid me beware of my beef and mutton, to-morrow.

I KNEW the loss of appetite, to be a common effect of joy, and therefore endeavoured to persuade myself, that all was well. When we arose from table, he said he had some business to transact, for a gentleman in Paris, but that he should return to tea, and desired Lucy, to have her voice and harpsichord, in tune, to sing him some new songs; he then put on his sword, and walked briskly out of the house.

LUCY and I remained for some moments, petrified; we could neither speak, nor look at each other—at length, she arose, and with a slow pace, and down-cast look, advanced to where I sat, then fell upon her knees, before me, and bathed my hand with her fast-falling tears, I could not bid her rise, but sunk down by her, and joined in fervent prayer, for my husband, and her brother's safety.

A THOUSAND times the dear unhappy girl implored my pardon, as though she were
the

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 117

the guilty cause, of what I did, or might, hereafter, suffer. Her anguish seemed unutterable; and alarmed, and distressed, as I then was, I found it absolutely necessary to conceal my own fears, and speak peace to her distracted, tortured mind.

IN less than an hour, Sir John relieved us from this shocking state—at the transporting sound of his voice, we endeavoured to compose ourselves—Lucy flew to open the door of the parlour, where we had remained, during his absence; she rushed into his arms, and fainted there. The strong transition over-powered her every faculty, and it was a considerable time, before she shewed any signs of life. I do not blush to tell you that Sir John wept, over his beloved sister.

As soon as she had power of articulation, she gazed intently on her brother, and exclaimed, Where is the unhappy man? and do I see my dearest brother safe, and unstained with blood?

My dear Lucy, Sir John replied, calm your spirits—you need have no apprehensions, either for Sir James Miller, or for me—he is
fallen

fallen below my resentment; and you might have been assured, from the first, that any man who dared to treat a woman ill, must be a coward in his heart.

BUT did you meet? cried Lucy. No, said Sir John, and I will answer for it, we never shall, if he can avoid it; and I promise you, I shall not seek the wretch.

BUT pray, Sir John, said I, how came you acquainted with his ungenerous behaviour? As vice and folly are generally connected, replied Sir John, he was weak enough, to inform against himself, by a letter which he wrote me, to Paris, sometime after his marriage; and concluded it with presenting lady Miller's compliments, and hoping that, notwithstanding what had passed, we might still be friends, and live upon good terms.

IN my answer, I told him that though fighting had formerly been my profession, I was neither a bully, nor a bravo, and if he could acquit himself with honour, of a breach of faith to a woman of unquestioned merit, I was ready to accord him the friendship he desired; but as I looked upon that to be impossible,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 119

possible, I hoped he would, at least, be ready to afford me the only satisfaction, that remained in his power to offer, or mine to receive. That I should leave Paris, in a few days, and call upon him, as soon as I arrived in London.

I SAW his servant, near this house, when I alighted, and I have reason to think he was placed there, to watch my coming; as Sir James and his lady set out, in a few minutes after, for Paris. And I think there now remains nothing, but to wish my dear Lucy joy, of her escape, from such a contemptible animal.

I AM, indeed, my dear brother, said Lucy, truly joyful—what a wretch should I have been, if any misfortune had befallen you, on my account! how could I ever have looked upon my more than sister, or her little angel babes. Sir John and I endeavoured to change the subject, but Lucy frequently recurred to it.

AH, Emily! her wounds are not yet healed. We spent the evening in a kind of pleasing melancholy—though our hearts were at peace, our spirits were too much agitated, to be chearful.

120 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

cheerful. I proposed our setting out for Straffon Hill, next day, but Sir John seemed inclined to stay, for a few days longer. As I have now no apprehensions, from Sir James Miller, I can have no objection, though I confess I long for pure air, and peace; two charming things, which are never to be found, in a great city.

I CONGRATULATE you, on lady Lawfon's recovery. How does poor lady Harriet? Have you civilized Sir James Thornton? I mean, has he yet fallen in love? What is Fanny Weston doing? I shall think her much to blame, if she does not make a conquest—the country is the place, to inspire sentiment—in London, we think of nothing, but outward *shew*—*happinefs* is intirely out of the question. May it long continue to reside, at Woodfort, sincerely wishes Your

F. STRAFFON.

P. S. What an amazing long letter! but I am never tired of conversing with you—Sir John, and my Lucy, and my babes, all send you their loves.

LETTER

LETTER XVIII.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

My dear FANNY,

YOU very aptly compare your last letter to a news paper, which records facts indiscriminately—how could you, possibly, think of the charming nun, however engaging, or affecting her situation, and thence proceed to a sober lecture on matrimony, before you mentioned events so interesting, as those which related to Sir John, Lucy, and yourself? You are certainly a perfect stoic, and I begin to fear you will soon be above “life’s weakness, and its comforts too.” You see how gladly I lay hold of the first opportunity, I ever had, to criticise on you. I have no doubt but you will explain away all my objections, by next post; but, in the mean time, I shall fully enjoy that *self-given* consequence, and superiority, which we all assume, when we take the liberty of condemning another person’s conduct.

BUT to be serious, both my lord and I are charmed with Sir John—his tenderness

VOL. I.

G

for

for his amiable sister, sets his bravery in the strongest light—and you really did not blush to record it! my dear Fanny must have a great deal of effrontery, notwithstanding her modest countenance, and her meek air. I am in such high spirits, at the happy conclusion of this disagreeable affair, that I cannot command my pen to write one rational line.

YES, it shall tell you, that all this family congratulate our dear Lucy, and you, but more particularly her, on her lucky escape from that contemptible wretch, Sir James Miller; and though we all hope, and believe ourselves to be very good christians, there is not one of us would lament his untimely end, if he should be detected in picking pockets, in Paris, and make his exit, at the *Greve*.

AND so my dear wise sister very prudently warned me against teasing my lord—it was a proper caution, and I shall use it—am not I very obedient? but she left me at full liberty, to torment any one else—I shall use this latitude, also. To begin: I must inform you that I am in full possession of the history of our lovely nun, and unrestrained from communicating it to you; yet shall I not gratify your curiosity,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 123

curiosity, which I am certain is as great as mine, until you are brought to confess it; provoked to say, Psha, Emily, how can you be so teizing?

I MUST now hasten to your queries, as we are going to dine at lord Withers's, four miles off. I have prevailed on lady Lawson to be of the party; Sir William is not returned from London, yet. I do believe Sir James Thornton is in love, though we cannot guess with whom. He is lately become thoughtful, and reserved; we rally him on his gravity, and tell him he is "proud, melancholy, and gentleman-like:" though he has lost his chearfulness, his good humour is invincible, and he strives to laugh, whenever he thinks we wish he should.

I MUCH fear that Cupid has played at cross-bow, amongst our young folks, and dealt out left-handed arrows. I fear poor Fanny Weston is a stricken deer, and am apprehensive, that the hand which gave, will never heal the wound. She sits, whole evenings, alone, in her chamber, listning to an Æolian harp, and sometimes looks as if she had been in tears. She says she will go to London,

from York ; but I fancy she may as well return to Woodfort, as all our male inmates will have left us.

LORD Seymour talks of going to the hot wells, at Bristol, in a few days ; and Sir James Thornton goes from York, to his own seat, in the West. Lady Harriet continues pretty much the same, except when captain Barnard is mentioned ; which happens, too frequently, as he still visits at lady Ransford's.

ADIEU, dear Fanny, the coach is ready, and Sir James Thornton waiting in the ante-chamber of the dressing-room, to hand me to it. I cannot help laughing, at the idea of his grave face. A thousand loves attend Sir John, Lucy, and the babes.

Once more, adieu.

E. WOODVILLE.

LET.

L E T T E R XIX.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

Straffon Hill.

IT is a remark, much to the honour of human nature, that happiness creates benevolence. I am, therefore, pleased with illustrating it, by telling you, that the calm and rational delight I receive, from my present happy situation, has rendered my mind so placid, and serene, as to prevent my resenting your ladyship's sarcastical comment, on my last letter. *Au contraire*, I am pleased at your becoming a critic; as I think you want a little of that *self-given* consequence, which is sometimes necessary, to give us weight with others.

BUT now to prove to you, that I am not stoic enough to be indifferent about your good opinion, I must inform you, that the first part of my last letter, was wrote a few minutes before Sir John's arrival, the remainder, the day after. And, as I know my dear Emily's weak spirits are too apt to be alarmed, I chose to proceed in continuation, in hopes, that by seeming to treat the matter lightly, I

126 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

might prevent her apprehensions : and this remarkable instance of my delicacy, has her pretty little ladyship construed into a total want of feeling. But you love *faire la guerre*; and now, look to yourself.

I NEVER pretended to be devoid of curiosity; it is a passion inherent to our natures, and, properly conducted, may be productive of every good.—It is the source of knowledge; and, in my mind, the strongest mark of distinction, between the rational, and brute creation.—It is our birth-right, descended to us from our first mother.—You will, perhaps, say, it is an inheritance we might have dispensed with, as it has certainly cost us too dear; yet, as I have already said, if well cultivated, it is, a fruitful soil; but, in the hands of the weak, or idle, it can bring forth nothing but weeds, or thorns.

AGAINST this kind of produce, I warned my Emily, and still will warn her, lest they, at any time, should wound her tender heart. I frankly confess myself interested in the fate of your lovely nun; but, instead of saying, as you would have me, Psha, Emily, how can you be so teizing! I shall say, Pray, Emily,
do

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 127

do not be teizing, but write me a full and true account, of every circumstance you know, relating to the charming vestal; and of every thing else, that you think can afford any entertainment, to

Your affectionate sister,

F. STRAFFON.

L E T T E R XX.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

WHAT a triumph, for such a little, insignificant animal as me, to be able to ruffle the calm dignity of a female philosopher! I shall begin to think myself of some consequence; rather of more weight, than *the fly upon the chariot wheel*. For, indeed, my dear Fanny, notwithstanding your efforts to disguise it, you were a little chagrined, at the small attempt towards pertness, which I ventured to make, in my last letter; and, in truth, you wise ones, when once thrown off your guard, make as foolish a figure, as any of us simpletons.

I HAVE heard it said, that a person who never learnt to fence, shall be able to disconcert the greatest master of that noble science; nay more, may possibly kill him, by a random pass, while he stands in the best posture of defence, and is aiming at his antagonist, in all the profundity of quarte, or tierce. Just such a scrambling combatant have you to deal with, who, without the
least

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 129

least skill in the art of logic, presumes to enter the lists with your wife ladyship.

AND so, Fanny, curiosity is now become a virtue, “productive of every good, the source of knowledge, the distinguishing mark of rationality, an inheritance descended to us,” &c. And yet poor Emily is not to be allowed the use of this treasure, but to be deprived of her birth-right, and treated as an absolute alien to our grand-mother Eve. Is not this a little hard?

BUT now what says *my philosophy*, to this severe treatment? I think I see you laugh, at that expression. But pray, madam, is not the great use and end, of that exalted study, to render us happy, by perfectly acquiescing in our own lot, and wisely contemning all those advantages, that are denied us? Grant me but this, and I will immediately prove myself a philosopher, by shewing you how differently we think, in regard to this same treasure, called curiosity, which I am not permitted to have any share of.

AND first, I absolutely deny, that it ever was, or can be, productive of good. *Au*

G 5

contraire,

contraire, I have scripture on my side, to prove, that it was the original cause of every physical, and moral ill, that has happened in this world, for I know not how many thousand years. You say, "it is inherent to our natures." Fie, Fanny! Could the Author of good then have punished dame Eve, and all her descendants, merely for following the bent of that nature, he had himself endued her with?—Impossible!

I SAY, it was the devil, who first introduced it into Paradise, and infected poor Eve; for it certainly is contagious, and never to be eradicated. From her then, it has descended to all her offspring, not as an inheritance though, but rather as an uncancellable mortgage upon their natural patrimony.

You say, "it is the source of knowledge." There again, my dear, you are unluckily mistaken.—Pride is, undoubtedly, the first motive; for not *to be wise*, but to be *thought wiser*, than our neighbours, is the great reward. "A distinguishing mark of rationality." You are really no philosopher, lady Straffon.—Have you never seen a dog, or cat, raise up their ears, and listen, with all the avidity
with

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 131

with which an old maid hearkens to a scandalous report of some blooming beauty of eighteen? Indeed, my dear, you must have observed this, frequently; and I am firmly persuaded, that those animals I have mentioned, are just as instinctively curious, as any duchess in Christendom.

I THINK I have now fairly demolished all your arguments, in favour of this precious commodity: but as you *boast* the possession of it, which I believe no woman ever did, but yourself, I will shew myself the paragon of good nature, and gratify the weakness I condemn, by telling you the history of our amiable nun.

How unlucky now, for your poor dear curiosity! Lady Ransford has this moment alighted.——I must fly to receive her, and bid you

Adieu.

E. WOODVILLE.

L E T T E R XXI.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

AND so, my pretty little Bizarre, you are really delighted, at having ruffled a female philosopher; and from thence are determined to derive self-consequence: *Helas, ma pauvre enfant!* How grieved am I to mortify, by undeceiving you? for I cannot help informing you (though I know it to be cruel) that I have never been so much pleased, with any of your letters, as your two last.

BROUGHT up, from your early infancy, with a high deference for my opinions, which, for some years past, I have wished you to shake off, lest it should prevent the free use of your own understanding, and occasion your receiving notions upon trust, without giving yourself the trouble of examining them. I am delighted to find that my dear Emily will, though in pure *badinage*, exert her reason, and argue, if not logically, at least ingeniously.

Go on, my lively opponent, and push the mock war between us, as far as it will go; though,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 133

though, indeed, you have left me little to say, on the subject of curiosity, except, that it certainly was the original source of knowledge, however unmeritorious, as it first induced Eve's trespass, in tasting the forbidden fruit : but, I think, we have fairly exhausted this thesis, and now, for *quelque chose de nouveau*.

SIR John has received a letter, from Sir James Miller, wherein " he intreats that Sir John will not banish him his native land, " by keeping up any resentment against him. " He implores Lucy's pardon ; and is mean " enough to give hints, that his crime has " been his punishment." Poor abject wretch ! Sir John has assured him, that he can never feel resentment for a person he despises ; so that he may return to England in perfect safety.

THIS last contemptible *manœuvre* of Sir James, has, I think, completed Lucy's cure. Her faded charms begin to recover their former lustre ; and I had the pleasure of overhearing her singing a very lively air, as she walked, just now, under my window. Are not these good symptoms, my fair philosopher ?

No

134 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

No friendly visitant has broke in upon me, to interrupt the tediousness of this epistle; but the clock has just reminded me of an appointment I made with my Edward, and Emily, to take them to our park. Exact punctuality should ever be preserved, in promises made to those, who are not capable of judging of the reasons, which might be given for a breach of it.—I, therefore, must fly to them, and bid my dear Emily

Adieu.

F. STRAFFON.

L E T T E R XXII.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

My dear FANNY,

I AM heartily glad that the mock war, as you call it, between us, is at an end, as I should, at present, be totally unable to support my share in the combat, and, of course, must fall before the conqueror. I have been unusually dispirited, and languid, for these two days.—I feel, as if I had cause to be melancholy, and yet endeavour to persuade myself that I have none. This is a state not to be described: and to you, who, I dare say, have never experienced it, may appear ridiculous; and yet, believe me, it is a painful situation.—But I flatter myself, I have rather caught, than bred this malady.

LORD Seymour left us, this morning; and, for some days before he set out, he seemed to have acquired an additional degree of melancholy softness. Love he can never feel more.—Besides, *my* lord seems infected with the same disorder; looks grave, and sighs. Tell me, then, Fanny, is it possible that male
friendship

friendship is so much more delicate and tender, than ours, that their mutual sadness could arise from a separation, for a few weeks, or perhaps, months. If this should be the real cause, I shall blush for my own want of sensibility.

I SHOULD think lord Seymour in such a state of mind, that no slight, or trivial misfortune, could possibly affect him ; for they who have once felt real anguish, may bid defiance to future ills. The arrows of adversity, may glance against, but cannot wound a heart, already broken. From sympathy alone, such minds can suffer.—But, Oh ! far, far be the thought, from Emily's fond bosom, that lord Woodville's sufferings should cause lord Seymour's sorrow ! It is impossible ! I am sorry I have expressed such a thought, even to you, my sister. I would blot it from the paper, if I could erase it from my mind.

WE had, last night, a concert, in a temple dedicated to Apollo, in the garden.—My lord, whose voice is harmony itself, was singing one of Shenstone's elegies. I accompanied

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 137

panied him on the harpsichord, and lord Seymour on the violencello.—At the words,

“ She was fair, and I could not but love,

“ She is faithless, and I am undone,”

I saw lord Seymour fix his eyes on lord Woodville's face, which, in a moment, became suffused with crimson; his voice faltered so much, that he could scarce finish the song.

THE moment it was ended, he quitted the temple. I felt myself alarmed: I feared he was taken ill, and went immediately towards the house. As I crossed the parterre, I saw him walking briskly, in a path that leads to the wood: this quieted my apprehensions for his health, but left my mind in a state incapable of thinking.—I retired to my chamber, and continued to muse, till summoned to supper.

THERE was no notice taken, of what had passed.—we parted earlier than usual, all but lord Seymour, and my lord, who continued together, till near four o'clock. I could not sleep, and wished to have risen, and either walked, or read; but was unwilling to discover

138 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

cover my restlessness, to him who caused it. When we met, at breakfast, Mr. Ransford, who was just arrived from London, asked my lord, in a low voice, if I had been ill, as he observed that I looked much paler, than usual.

WHAT a flutter am I in! Just as I had wrote the last word, my dear lord opened the door, and said he came to request the pleasure of my company, to see a new improvement he is making; and, with the most engaging affability, added, that he feared he had disturbed my rest, by sitting up so late, but thought an airing would do us both good.

HIS behaviour has made all the foregoing part of my letter, appear a vision to me. Do not reply to it, my Fanny, till you hear from me again; and I hope, by next post, to have forgot I ever wrote it.

ADIEU, adieu, that I may fly indeed, to the most amiable of men.

E. WOODVILLE.

P. S.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 139

P. S. You shall have the little history of the nun, with my next.—I rejoice at Lucy's recovery.—Happy, happy, may you all be!

LET.

L E T T E R XXIII.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFORD.

My dearest FANNY,

THE cloud that hung over my mind, is totally dispersed, and my happiness restored, with my reason. What a visionary must you think me! but do not chide me, my loved sister, lest, by endeavouring at a justification, I should fancy I had found reasons, to support my folly.

I NEVER spent so delightful a day, as the last on which I wrote to you. During our airing, which was about six miles, my lord appeared, if possible, more amiable to me, than ever. There was a peculiar air of tenderness, diffused through his voice and manner; perhaps the parting from his friend, had softened his already gentle nature. Perhaps—but why pry into his bosom, in search of a cause, which might render the effect less pleasing?

IN less than an hour, we arrived at the neatest, and most elegant cottage, I ever beheld.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 141

held. It was seated on the declivity of a hill, and defended from the North winds, by a small wood, so beautifully variegated, that even in this leafy season, summer, autumn, and winter, seemed to vye in the luxuriance of the different shades, which their several periods produce.

BEFORE the house a pendant lawn, covered with sheep and lambs, reached to the river, which winded in the most beautiful mazes, round the hill. Over the broadest part of it, was a Gothic bridge, of one arch, with a watch tower in the center; and on the other side of the house, stood a small nursery and shrubbery—I was never more agreeably surprised, than with this lovely scene. I really think if I was to meet with any severe affliction, that I should like to retire to this delightful solitude, and pass my days in it.

I FREQUENTLY saw my lord's eyes sparkle with pleasure, at that which I expressed. As I neither saw or heard a human creature, but ourselves, I begged to know who were the happy owners of this lovely spot? said I wished to see, and congratulate them, on their taste,
and

and felicity.—He said he would immediately comply with my request, and by so doing, increase the happiness of its possessors.

HE then led me to the house, which was as simply elegant within, as without—I think I never saw perfect neatness, before—and presented me to his nurse, an extreme good looking woman, about fifty—she knew not in what manner to receive me—humility and joy seemed to struggle in her countenance—I stepped forward, and embraced her—my lord seemed delighted, at what he was pleased to call my condescension.

THE good woman has been a widow, for twelve years; her husband was first gardener to my lord's father, and her son-in-law is now in the same station, with us. Her daughter is a very pretty woman, about two-and-twenty; and ready to lye in, of a second child. I never beheld such a cherubim, as the first. My lord said, archly, he hoped his foster sister and I should be better acquainted, and that she would undertake the same good office for me, that her mother had done for his.

THE

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 143

THE poor girl blushed, and curtsied; I felt my cheeks glow, and walked to the window—I confess I was charmed with his attention to such a point, which the foolish lords of the creation, generally think below them. He then inquired for his nurse's mother, and the finest old woman I ever saw, came into the room—I saluted her also—her hair was perfectly silver, and her skin like down—she blessed, and embraced my lord, while tears of joy, and gratitude, ran down her fair, unfurrowed cheek.

My lord was affected, and saw me so; and in order to change the subject, told the good woman of the house, he was come to dine with her.—She looked amazed, and so should I, had I then thought him serious.—But I found he was so, when he told her she could certainly give us good bread, butter, rashers, and eggs, and a sallad; and that he would take care of the rest.

I SMILED assent; but said we should send home, to prevent the company's waiting. He said, there was no necessity for it, as he was quite satisfied that our friends at Woodfort, would sit down to dinner, at the same instant

stant that we did, without hearing from us. I then supposed he had left orders that they should not wait, and was pleased with the idea of our simple rustic meal. But I was to be still more surprized; for in about ten minutes, the coach arrived, with lady Harriet, Fanny Weston, Sir James Thornton, and Mr. Ransford. A sumpter car followed, with wine, and cold provisions.

THE beauty of the scene, the fineness of the day, the unpremeditatedness of the scheme, all conspired to render us more chearful, than we should have been, perhaps, in any other place, on earth; and we all returned home delighted with our little expedition, and full of gratitude to my lord, for the pleasure it had afforded us.

THIS is an enormous long letter, but you taught me to rise early; I can, therefore, spare time to my absent friends, as well as those about me; and I can never think that time better employed, than in proving to my dearest Fanny, that I am

Her truly affectionate sister,

E. WOODVILLE.

P. S.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 145

P. S. I fear I have delayed the history I now send you, too long ; perhaps your curiosity may be as much palled, as one's appetite sometimes is, by waiting for a second course ; which, though elegant in itself, cannot repair the damage done by the delay. But if you are a true epicure, and like the feast, you will feed heartily, though the tediousness of the cook, be ever so teizing to you.

The HISTORY of *Miss* CHARLOTTE
BEAUMONT.

AS the chief circumstances which relate to this lady, refer more to others, than herself, we must look back, to the first causes of those effects, which seem to have marked her fate. Unhappy, in the very article of her birth, though descended from a noble family, it will be necessary to give some account, of the authors of her being.

HER father, the present general Beaumont, was the youngest son of one of the most ancient, and illustrious houses, in France : but, as is generally the case with the superfluous branches of great families, of that nation, he

VOL. I.

H

was

was possessed of no other patrimony, than his high birth, a graceful person, and his sword.

THE church, and the army, are the only provisions, which seem to be designed for the cadets of the noblesse. To the latter, our young foldier of fortune, applied himself, and soon obtained a genteel post there. In this situation the then duchess dowager of H— saw, and was captivated, with our young hero.—Though her age more than doubled his, her person was still pleasing, and her fortune so infinitely superior to his most sanguine hopes, that he did not long hesitate to accept such a splendid establishment.

THEY passed some years together, with that polite indifference, which distinguishes the married couples of high rank, in that gay nation. At length, the duchess began to grow weary, of treading the same dull circle, for so many years, and proposed to the general, that they should visit one of her estates, in *Languedoc*, and pass a summer there. Though he was, by no means, tired of the *grande monde*, nor could possibly form any very delightful idea of retirement, with such a companion,

panion, as her grace, he, politely, assented to her request.

WHEN they had been, some time, in the country, the duchess hinted a desire of sending for a young lady, who was a distant relation of her first husband's, and whom she had formerly placed in a convent. This proposal was perfectly agreeable to the general. The most desirable *têtes à têtes*, sometimes grow languid; but the intervention of a third person, in such a situation as theirs, was most devoutly to be wished for.

HER grace set out, the next morning, for the convent de —, which was about five leagues from her seat, and returned, in the evening, accompanied by the too lovely Charlotte D'Etree.—The general, though well accustomed to the power of beauty, became suddenly captivated.—Never had he beheld such a face, and form, before—such simple elegance, such unaffected grace, the beauties of Venus, with Dian's modesty.

WHILE the lovely Charlotte felt, at least, as much surprize, at sight of him, We have already said, his person was remarkably grace-

148 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

ful, his air at once engaging, and commanding; nor was any outward ornament neglected, that could set off such a form to the best advantage.—What an amazing effect must such a figure have, upon a girl not yet seventeen ! who had been bred in a cloister, and had never seen, or at least conversed, with any man who did not wear a *cowl*.

THE duchess attempted to apologize for Charlotte's astonishment, by observing, that the poor girl had been brought up in absolute ignorance; but hoped, when she had been some time with her, that her awkward amazement would wear off. She might have talked, for ever, without interruption. The general had neither speech, nor hearing; his faculties seemed all absorbed, in one; and through his eyes alone, his heart was, for the first time, taught to feel a real passion.

THE little wanton god, too much the general's friend, soon inspired the innocent, and fair D'Etree, with the same sentiments. Never did the tyrant reign more absolute, than in the hearts of these his willing slaves. Whole months passed away, in all the delights of mutual fondness, seemed to the lovers, but
a day;

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 149

a day ; and when, at the end of autumn, the duchess talked of returning to Paris, it appeared to them like being doomed to banishment.

CHARLOTTE was to accompany the duchess thither ; but the general knew their interviews must be less frequent, and more liable to interruption, than in the charming solitude of *belle vue*. After every excuse was obviated, and every possible contrivance of delay exhausted, they were forced to submit ; and the once gay and lively Charles Beaumont, set out for the metropolis, with infinitely more regret, than he had ever quitted it. The duchess was, happily, not of a jealous nature ; and the enamoured pair behaved with so much circumspection, that she never seemed to have the least suspicion, of their mutual attachment, to the last hour of her life.

THE natural consequences of their guilty love, now began to make Charlotte taste the bitter ingredients of that intoxicating cup, of which she had drank so deeply. Infamy stared her in the face ; and, though a criminal passion had triumphed over her chastity, her modesty was not yet extinguished. Sleepless

150 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

nights, and days of anguish, now became her portion. She detested herself, and all the world; all, but the guilty author of her misery. How often did she wish, she never had quitted the cloister; but there, like the desert rose, have bloomed, and died unseen, in innocence and peace.

THE general, whose fondness, if possible, was encreased by her situation, said every thing in his power, to console her, by promising to secure her fame. Many were the expedients he thought of, but none of them seemed sufficient, to satisfy the delicate apprehensions of the unhappy Charlotte. At length, she recollected, that there was a young woman, in the convent where she had been bred, whose father and mother were dead, and had left her in such low circumstances, that she could neither afford, to live in the world, or pay her pension, where she remained; and was, therefore, under the painful necessity of taking the veil, contrary to her inclinations, or of going into the world, as a dependent.

THIS person, then, she fixed on, as a confidante; and immediately wrote to her to
come

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 151

come to Paris, with ample promises of taking care of her future fortune. Mademoiselle Laval was overjoyed at such a summons, and instantly obeyed it. In the mean time, the general hired a very neat furnished house, for her reception, and appointed servants, and every thing proper, before her arrival — She was informed, that she was to personate a lady whose husband was just dead, and who was come from a distant part of Normandy, to prosecute a law-suit, and lye in, at Paris.

THE unhappy situation of this young woman's circumstances, made her readily acquiesce in every thing that Charlotte required; and she entered her house, with all the melancholy solemnity of an afflicted relict. In a few days after her arrival, the real mourner, the poor, wretched Charlotte, went to visit her; and, after shedding floods of tears upon her bosom, acquainted her with her unhappy situation, and implored her assistance.

MADemoiselle Laval, naturally good-natured, and softened by the unhappy condition of her friend, promised every thing she could desire;—endeavoured to soothe and

150 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

nights, and days of anguish, now became her portion. She detested herself, and all the world; all, but the guilty author of her misery. How often did she wish, she never had quitted the cloister; but there, like the desert rose, have bloomed, and died unseen, in innocence and peace.

THE general, whose fondness, if possible, was encreased by her situation, said every thing in his power, to console her, by promising to secure her fame. Many were the expedients he thought of, but none of them seemed sufficient, to satisfy the delicate apprehensions of the unhappy Charlotte. At length, she recollected, that there was a young woman, in the convent where she had been bred, whose father and mother were dead, and had left her in such low circumstances, that she could neither afford, to live in the world, or pay her pension, where she remained; and was, therefore, under the painful necessity of taking the veil, contrary to her inclinations, or of going into the world, as a dependent.

THIS person, then, she fixed on, as a confidante; and immediately wrote to her to
come

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 151

come to Paris, with ample promises of taking care of her future fortune. Mademoiselle Laval was overjoyed at such a summons, and instantly obeyed it. In the mean time, the general hired a very neat furnished house, for her reception, and appointed servants, and every thing proper, before her arrival — She was informed, that she was to personate a lady whose husband was just dead, and who was come from a distant part of Normandy, to prosecute a law-suit, and lye in, at Paris.

THE unhappy situation of this young woman's circumstances, made her readily acquiesce in every thing that Charlotte required; and she entered her house, with all the melancholy solemnity of an afflicted relict. In a few days after her arrival, the real mourner, the poor, wretched Charlotte, went to visit her; and, after shedding floods of tears upon her bosom, acquainted her with her unhappy situation, and implored her assistance.

MADemoiselle Laval, naturally good-natured, and softened by the unhappy condition of her friend, promised every thing she could desire;—endeavoured to soothe and

152 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

comfort her affliction; and, at last, settled matters, in such a way, that the moment Charlotte found herself ill, she was to go there; that every necessary preparation should be made, and every tender care taken of her, and her offspring.

EVERY thing happened to their utmost wishes: she was taken ill, as she was dressing to go to a ball, at the English ambassador's. The duchess was luckily prevented from going, by a slight cold; and Charlotte, when she got into the carriage, had no one to oppose her being set down, where she pleased.— She went directly to her friend's house, and was there happily delivered of a son, and daughter, who were immediately baptized, by the names of Charles, and Charlotte.

IN as short a time as was possible, after this event, the general, and one of his particular friends, carried Charlotte home, in a sedan chair. She said she had been taken ill, at the ball, and went directly to bed, where she continued, for some days: and, to carry on the deceit, mademoiselle Laval confined herself to her bed, and went through all the forms, of a real *accouchment*.

THIS

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 153

THIS great event so well over, the general thought himself the happiest man living.—He doated on his children, and perfectly adored their lovely mother.—But she continued to appear gloomy, and dejected; and, at last, declared, she should never know peace, while the living witnesses of her shame, continued in the same kingdom with her. She seldom saw them, and when she did, expressed abhorrence, rather than tenderness, towards them. She behaved with the utmost coldness, to the general, and affected to be infinitely more miserable, than she had ever been before.

THE general was almost distracted at her conduct, and, at length, consented to the removal of the children. It was agreed that Laval should go over to England, take upon her the name of Beaumont, and educate them as her own, till the duchess died—as soon as that should happen, he promised to marry Charlotte, and receive them, as the orphans of a near relation.

IN the mean time, he settled a very handsome income on Laval, and the little innocents set out for London, with their fictiti-

154 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

ous mother, who felt, however, infinitely more tenderness for them, than their real one seemed to have done.

NOTHING remarkable happened, during their infancy. Mademoiselle Laval, by the general's recommendation, became acquainted with many families of distinction, and though quite unacquainted with the world, behaved herself so properly, that she was as much esteemed, as known, and her lovely children universally admired.

WHEN they were about seven years old, the duchess died, and in as short a space, as decency would admit of, the general fulfilled his promise, to his still adored, and beautiful Charlotte. On this occasion, mademoiselle Laval, who really doated on her amiable charge, felt the tenderest concern at the thoughts of parting with it—but she might have spared her sorrow, for madame de Beaumont was, by no means, inclined to rob her of it. On the contrary, when the general proposed the children's return, she grew outrageous, and declared she would never see him more, if he attempted to bring them into any part of France. She was born to rule his fate,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 155
and he submitted, though reluctantly, to her
inhuman, and unnatural commands.

IN about ten months, after their marriage,
she brought him a son, which, in some mea-
sure, consoled him for the loss of his other
children; and, in another year, presented him
with a daughter. In a little time, his fond-
ness was wholly transferred to the objects of
her adoration—never was so fond a mother;
and madame de Beaumont was looked upon
as the pattern of maternal affection, while she
not only abandoned, but detested, her former
offspring.

THE general's letters to Laval, became
less frequent; and though he punctually re-
mitted her income, he seldom mentioned those,
for whose use it was designed. In vain poor
Laval endeavoured to awaken the tender feel-
ings of a father, in his heart, by boasting the
amazing beauty of his Charlotte, or mention-
ing the fine parts, and accomplishments, of
his amiable Charles. Nature seemed dead in
him, as much as in their cruel mother.

AT length, worn by the perpetual remon-
strances of the humane, and generous Laval,

156 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

he obtained a commission for his son, who was then about sixteen, in a regiment that was to embark from Dunkirk, for America; but sent strict orders that he should not go to Paris, and conjured Laval to keep him still ignorant of his birth.

POOR Charlotte almost died away, at the thoughts of being separated from her brother. It was the first cause she had ever known for sorrow, and nature seemed inclined to make them both amends, for the loss of parental affection, by bestowing a double portion of fraternal love, on each.

OUR young foldier, whose ardor for glory, was extreme, was all gratitude to his supposed mother, for suffering him to follow the bent of his inclination; and, at the appointed time, he quitted London, with a heart filled at once with bravery, and tenderness.

IN order to divert the melancholy which affected Charlotte, for her brother's absence, lady Sandford invited the feigned mademoiselle de Beaumont, and her supposed daughter, to pass some time, at her seat in the country. The invitation was readily accepted, and there
Charlotte,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 157

Charlotte, now in her seventeenth year, first saw lord Seymour.

HER beauty was then only in its dawn, but even then, like Aurora breaking through the clouds, it gave a promise of the brightest day. The tender regret she felt for her brother's absence, gave an additional softness to her voice, and manners; and the expressive sensibility of her large hazel eyes, seemed increased, by her gentle distress.

SUCH an amiable object could not fail of inspiring passion, in a heart less susceptible than lord Seymour's, or indeed, in any heart, that was not guarded by a pre-possession. He soon felt the most ardent, and sincere affection, for her, nor was he the only person who was sensible of the power of her charms. The young duke of B— saw her, at a ball, at Northampton, and became instantly enamoured—He waited on lady Sandford, in a few days after, and with all the precipitancy of youth, high rank, and fortune, proposed himself to mademoiselle de Beaumont, for her daughter.

WHETHER

WHETHER Charlotte's delicacy was really hurt, by such a proceeding, or whether she then felt a preference for lord Seymour, she instantly rejected the duke's proposal, with an air of *fierté*, unknown to her before. mademoiselle de Beaumont, who tenderly loved her, acquiesced in her determination, and resolved not to acquaint her real parents, that such a match had been proposed.

CHARLOTTE was transported, at her feigned mother's kind condescension, and promised the most implicit obedience, which indeed she had ever shewn, to all her commands. She began now, to recover her spirits, was all chearfulness, and vivacity; and from this pleasing transition, she acquired, if possible, new charms; and each, and every day, lord Seymour became more, and more enamoured.

THE two happiest months of Charlotte's life, were now passed, and mademoiselle de Beaumont talked of returning to London. Before they set out, lord Seymour found an opportunity, of disclosing his passion to Charlotte. She received his declaration, with that
frank-

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 159

frankness, and candour, that ever dwell with generous minds ; but, at the same time, told him, that she considered herself under such obligations to her mother, for her conduct towards her, in regard to the duke of B—, that she would never listen to any persons addresses, who had not the sanction of her approbation.

THE enamoured Seymour, whose passion was as truly delicate, as the fair object that inspired it, was, now, at the summit of felicity—he threw himself at Charlotte's feet, and poured forth his soul, in the warmest expressions of gratitude, for her generous, and, unaffected behaviour ; and, at the same time, obtained her leave to apply to mademoiselle de Beaumont for her consent, as soon as they should return to London.

HE was permitted the happiness of attending them, thither, and the day after their arrival, waited on mademoiselle de Beaumont, to intreat her leave, to pay his addresses to her lovely daughter. True love is ever timid, and conscious as lord Seymour was, that the advantage, of birth, and fortune, were on his side, he felt, perhaps, more apprehensions, on this

160 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

this occasion, than a young ensign would, at addressing a lady of the highest rank.

ALL that he knew of Charlotte's circumstances, or condition, was, that her mother passed for the widow of a general officer, that her fortune was small, but sufficient to support her little family, genteelly, with economy; and that she had maintained an unblemished reputation in London, for near seventeen years.

BUT how were the generous, and disinterested Seymour's fears increased, when Mademoiselle de Beaumont told him she was highly sensible of the honour he intended her daughter, but that she thought her yet too young to marry, and that she had laid herself under an engagement, never to dispose of Charlotte, without first consulting her father's family, and friends! she conjured him, as a man of honour, not to mention his passion, to Charlotte, as by inspiring her with a mutual one, he might, perhaps, render them both miserable.

LORD Seymour instantly told her it was out of his power to obey her injunction, as it
was

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 161

was by Charlotte's permission, he had then the honour of intreating her consent, and that he neither could, nor would desist, from endeavouring to gain a heart, on which all his happiness in this life, depended. Mademoiselle de Beaumont was moved, even to tears, at the unhappy situation of the lovers. She, too plainly, saw the obstacles that must prevent their union, but generously promised, and resolved, to do every thing in her power, for their mutual happiness.

LORD Seymour ventured to remonstrate to her, that with regard to the duke of B—'s proposal, she had acted as sole parent, and guardian of her daughter, and he could not see the necessity of farther consultation, for accepting, than refusing a lover. She owned her tenderness for Charlotte, had, in that case, triumphed over her promise, but she had, even then, only assumed a negative power, which was more in right of her daughter, than herself, for she never could think it just, that either parents, or friends, should even persuade a person to marry, contrary to their own inclinations. She told him she would write, immediately, to France, and represent
his

his lordship's birth, fortune, and person, in the advantageous light in which she beheld them.

EXALTED as his ideas were of the object of his passion, he had great reason to flatter himself, that his alliance would not be condemned, by any family in France; and when he considered that the exquisite perfection of his charming Charlotte, must be unknown to those persons, who were to be consulted in the disposal of them, his fears would sometimes vanish, and his fond heart beat, with all the transporting hopes of successful love.

CHARLOTTE, who had never heard mademoiselle de Beaumont talk of her father's family, till now, considered the difficulties that were started, in another light, and fancied she only meant them to protract the marriage, till she should be eighteen, which she had often heard her say, was full early for a young lady to marry. However, without inquiring, she perfectly acquiesced in her supposed mother's conduct, and while she had the happiness of seeing and hearing the tenderest of lovers and most charming of men, she knew not a wish ungratified. mademoiselle
de

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 163

de Beaumont fulfilled her promise, by writing immediately, to the general, and mentioning lord Seymour, in the justest, and, of course, most pleasing light.

IT happened that the general, and his lady, were, at that time, at Aix la Chapelle, where he had been seized with a violent fever; and though the letter was forwarded to him, as the characters of the superscription were known by his lady, it lay, for some time, unopened.

DURING this interval, the fictitious mademoiselle de Beaumont was attacked by the small pox, which appeared of so malignant a sort, that her fate was quickly pronounced, by her physicians. As soon as she was acquainted with her disorder, she forbade Charlotte to come near her, as she had never had it; but in vain she commanded, or lord Seymour entreated her, to absent herself, a moment, from her bedside. She said it was her first, and should be her last act, of disobedience; and for that reason, she hoped her dear, and tender parent would pardon it.

OVERCOME by her filial piety, they suffered her to undergo such constant and violent fatigue,

164 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

fatigue, as, at any other time, would have destroyed her delicate, and beauteous frame. But she supported it, with such a tender alacrity, and attention, as amazed and affected every one who saw her : even lord Seymour's love was encreased, by his admiration of her virtues, and rose almost to adoration.

WHEN mademoiselle de Beaumont was informed of her danger, which was but a few hours before her death, she desired to be left alone with Charlotte.—After embracing, and imploring blessings on her, she told her, that neither her time, nor strength, would permit her revealing a secret, that was of the utmost consequence to her. But as she had ever endeavoured to be prepared for the tremendous event, that was now come to pass, she had kept a journal of her life, from the time she quitted the convent de ———, to the moment of her illness ; that in those papers she would find her own history included, and that of *her real parents*.

CHARLOTTE, though drowned in tears, was all attention, till those astonishing words, *her real parents!* smote her ear.—She then cried out, Ah, madam ! will you not only abandon,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 165

abandon, but deny me? Alas! what has your Charlotte done! Be comforted, my more than daughter, she replied; I was not worthy of such a blessing.—Yet still, I hope, more worthy, than they who possess so rich a treasure, regardless of its value. But if their hearts, so long hardened to your blooming virtues, at length relent, and give you to the worthy Seymour, you will have no cause to regret their past neglect, or court their future protection. May you be happy! This key (taking one from her bosom) will explain what I cannot. And now, adieu, for ever!

THE sudden effects of surprize, joined to those of grief, quite overcame the afflicted Charlotte.—She fainted, and was conveyed, senseless, to her own apartment. Mademoiselle de Beaumont continued to breathe, till she heard Charlotte was restored to life; then yielded up her own.

THE next day Charlotte was seized with convulsions; and immediately after, the small-pox appeared, but of a safe, and gentle kind—; the malignity of the disorder had spent its force, upon mademoiselle de Beaumont; and the low state, both of Charlotte's mind, and
body,

166 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

body, rendered its operations less powerful. Lord Seymour never quitted her apartment, though not permitted to enter her chamber; nor could he be prevailed on, even to rest himself on a couch, till the physicians pronounced her out of danger.

As soon as it was possible, she saw him: he appeared more altered, than herself. Never was such an interview between two lovers. Their present loss of beauty, seemed to augment their fondness; and each felt more real tenderness for the other, than at any former instant of their lives. Lord Seymour, though he lamented the death of mademoiselle de Beaumont, very sincerely, now thought that every bar to his happiness was removed; and as Charlotte appeared to be the mistress of her own fate, he had no apprehensions that his could be unhappy.

SHE had laughed at madame de Beaumont's superstitious attachment to distant relations, whom she had not seen for many years, he therefore could not suspect her being infected with the same caprice. The mother said, she was bound by solemn engagements to the family of Beaumont; the daughter

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 167

daughter could have entered into none, as she left Paris, when an infant. He had, therefore, no reason to imagine, that any power on earth could oppose his felicity; and indulged his fond imagination with perspective views of fancied bliss, which he was fated, never to enjoy!

The small-pox had been so favourable to Charlotte, that she had not been affected with the least mark, or alteration of feature; and the natural whiteness of her snowy skin, soon triumphed over the transitory redness, which is the common effect of that always disagreeable, and sometimes fatal, disorder.

BUT though her beauty had returned, her cheerfulness seemed buried in mademoiselle de Beaumont's tomb. Her affliction for her, as a parent, would, perhaps, have subsided, into a calm and gentle melancholy; but her last words had raised a tumult in her bosom, which she had not resolution sufficient to conquer. She frequently endeavoured to persuade herself, that her dear mother had raved, in her last moments; but the strength of her expression, and calmness of her manner, opposed that fond belief.

AFTER

168 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

AFTER her recovery, whole weeks elapsed without her having courage to open the cabinet, where the mystery of her fate lay concealed. She feared to meet with new obstacles, to that happiness, which she had promised herself, by being united to lord Seymour.

HIS delicacy had yet prevented him from expressing his ardent wishes for their union, as the cause of her amiable distress, was yet too recent; and many months might possibly have passed away, in the same irresolution, if the receipt of the following letter, had not precipitated this point, to a more immediate crisis.

To Mademoiselle de BEAUMONT.

Aix la Chapelle.

“ NEVER was amazement equal to mine,
“ at perusing your last letter! What, you!
“ wretch as you are, raised by my hand, and
“ supported by my bounty, presume to dic-
“ tate to me, in the disposal of my child!
“ And who is this lord Seymour? is he not
“ an heretic? if so, that is a sufficient ob-
“ jection, were he a prince

“ BUT

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 169

“ BUT surely, madam, since you take upon
“ you to inform us of intended marriages,
“ and act as plenipotentiary, between our
“ daughter, and ourselves, you should have
“ informed us of the duke of B——’s pro-
“ posal, and no more have dared to refuse,
“ than accept, a lover, for Charlotte Beau-
“ mont.

“ THE young duke, himself, has informed
“ me of his simple attachment to the silly girl,
“ and of the insolence, with which his pro-
“ posal was rejected. He inquired, whether
“ she was of our family? I did, as I ever
“ shall, disclaim her.

“ THE general, who has been ill of a
“ fever, by me commands you, on the re-
“ ceipt of this, to set out with Charlotte
“ Beaumont, instantly, for Paris. He has
“ devoted her to heaven, and found out a
“ fit retreat for that purpose, in the convent
“ of St. Anthony. Be it your business, as it
“ is your duty, to teach her an implicit
“ obedience, to his will.

“ SHE is now of an age, to be trusted with
“ the secret of her birth; but let her also

170 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ know, that when she relinquishes you,
“ as a mother, she is not to expect to find
“ one, in

“ CHARLOTTE BEAUMONT.

“ P. S. The general, and I, shall return
“ to Paris, in a few days, where we expect
“ not to see, but hear from you, and
“ Charlotte.

“ THE moment you arrive at the hotel
“ Anglaise, you are commanded to send to the
“ general; but, on no account, attempt to
“ come near our house.”

THE situation of the unhappy Charlotte's mind, upon reading this letter, is not to be described. Who is this cruel woman, she exclaimed, that thus disclaims an unoffending child? Oh! I will throw myself beneath her feet, and soften that obdurate heart, with tears. My father too; I have a father then! Sure he will raise me up, in his paternal arms, and bless me! They will relent; and when they see my Seymour, and know his wondrous worth, his wondrous love, they will be charmed, as their fond daughter is, and give me to his wishes.

FULL

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 171

FULL of these warm, and natural apprehensions, the half-distracted Charlotte flew to the cabinet, which, like Pandora's box, contained a thousand ills, and, with a trembling hand, unlocked it. The first objects that presented themselves to her view, were miniature portraits, of her father and mother. —She gazed, with joy and wonder. Never had she beheld such striking beauty, of both kinds; the manly, and the mild.

SHE kissed, embraced, wept over them; nay, knelt to them, implored their pity and protection, and, in one moment, was inspired with more respect and tenderness, for those inanimate figures, than she had ever felt for her supposed mother; though gratitude and esteem had answered all the purposes of filial affection, in her gentle nature.

SHE now sat down to search the book of fate, those fatal Sybils' leaves that told her doom; and while she read, felt every passion, that the human heart is capable of.—Yet still her love, and reverence for her parents, remained predominant; and she determined to sacrifice herself, to their unnatural commands, and pass her days in a cloister, if she could

not prevail on them to change their cruel purpose.

SHE quickly saw how improper it would have been to acquaint lord Seymour with her real situation, as he would, doubtless, oppose her returning to France, with all the eloquence of love.—Yet, to quit him, without making any excuse, or to descend to invent a false one, were equally repugnant, to her tender, and generous nature.

SHE had been bred in the Roman Catholic faith, but had never conversed with bigots, nor once thought that marrying the man she loved, could be deemed a crime, against any religion. The idea first shocked her, on her mother's pronouncing him an heretic; and she resolved to make the difference of opinions, a pretext, for postponing their marriage, till she could try to prevail on her parents, to give their consent; which she vainly hoped she should be able to obtain, from their tenderness, and his uncommon merits.

THEY know the power of love, said she, and will not, like vulgar, and unfeeling minds, attempt to oppose his uncontrollable decrees.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 173

decrees.—They will regard lord Seymour, for their Charlotte's sake; and his tenderness for me, shall appear, by that love and duty, that he shews to them.

THUS did the unhappy visionary fair one amuse herself, till lord Seymour came to pay his daily visit. He had been used, for some time past, to see her melancholy, and, at times, disturbed; but as soon as he then saw her, he perceived that her whole frame had been uncommonly agitated. And when he tenderly intreated to know the cause, she answered only, with a flood of tears; and begged he would not press her, on the subject.

THOUGH his fond heart was alarmed by a thousand different fears, he chose rather to bear that cruel state of suspense, than distress the object he adored; and immediately desisted, from any farther inquiries. When he left her, that evening, he felt an unusual degree of anxiety, and was several times tempted to return, and beg to know the source of her distress; but he feared to offend, by disobeying her commands; and hoped, at their next meeting, her chagrin might be dispelled.

LORD Seymour was to go out of town, for a few days, to the nuptials of a near relation; and his loved Charlotte had bid him adieu, with more than usual tenderness. Charlotte resolved to lay hold on the opportunity of lord Seymour's absence, to set out for France. She had found, in the late madame de Beaumont's cabinet, about two hundred pounds, in bills and money; out of this sum, she discharged all her servants, except her own maid, whom she determined to take with her. She ordered one of those she parted with, to remain in the house, till lord Seymour's return, in order to deliver him a letter, which she should leave for him.

SHE had now, she thought, settled matters in such a way, that nothing remained to obstruct her purposed journey.—But, alas! the most difficult part of her arduous task, was yet to come.—She was now, to bid adieu, to the man her soul adored. She knew not what passion was, till the severity of her fate, compelled her to wish to conquer it. A thousand times she attempted to write to him, who was now dearer, than ever, to her, but could not find words that were capable

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 175

capable of expressing her complicated feelings. —Two sleepless nights, and miserable days, thus passed. She dreaded lord Seymour's return; and, on the third, while the chaise waited to carry her off, she wrote the following lines.

To Lord SEYMOUR.

“ WITH a heart, and eyes overflowing
“ with the sincerest tenderness, at the sad
“ thought of being separated from the only
“ man, I ever did, or, shall ever love, I
“ find myself incapable of taking even a
“ transient leave of him. Oh! may it
“ prove so!

“ My flight must appear extraordinary to
“ you. Why am not I at liberty, to explain
“ my motives? But, be assured, they are
“ such, as your honour, and virtue would ap-
“ prove, though your fondness might oppose
“ the effect. I fly then, my dear lord Sey-
“ mour, to render myself more worthy of
“ you; to ease my heart of some scruples;
“ which, only, can prevent its being wholly
“ yours.

176 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ IF heaven smiles upon my purpose, you
“ shall hear quickly from me ; and surely
“ innocence, and love, so pure as mine, may
“ claim its care. But should it, for wise
“ purposes, unknown to me, blast all my
“ flattering hopes of happiness, and doom
“ me to the lowest wretchedness, thy image
“ still shall dwell within my heart, and shield
“ it from dishonour.

“ I WOULD say more, but cannot ; the
“ chaise waits to carry me—from whom !
“ from thee ! What agonies are in that
“ thought ! Nought but the hope of meet-
“ ing, soon again, could now enable me to say,
“ Adieu.

“ CHARLOTTE BEAUMONT.”

As soon as she had sealed her letter, she flung herself into the chaise, and pursued her journey ; which she performed, without meeting with any uncommon accident.

IN a few hours after she set out, her brother, who had been near two years absent, returned to London. His bravery had raised him to the rank of captain ; and, as the war was

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 177

was then over, he had obtained leave to visit his friends in England.

HE had not heard of mademoiselle de Beaumont's death, till he came to her house, and was at once informed of that, and Charlotte's abrupt departure. The amiable young man was extremely shocked, and grieved; and in the midst of his tears for mademoiselle de Beaumont, lamented the uncertainty of his loved sister's fate; and determined, as soon, as it was possible, to pursue her steps, to Paris.

JUST as he was quitting the house, his eyes swollen with tears, and his aspect impressed with the deepest sorrow, lord Seymour came to the door.—Young Beaumont issued out, regardless of a man he had never seen before; and lord Seymour, though at first surprized at his appearance, upon receiving Charlotte's letter, thought of him no more.

INDEED all traces of recollection, seemed to have been instantly erased from his memory, and he remained like a man suddenly transfixed by lightning. It was some time before he had power to ask, when she set out? or

178 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

whither she was gone? And when the servant replied to his queries, he continued to repeat them, without seeming to receive the information he so earnestly desired.

HE read her letter, a thousand times, yet would neither credit that, nor the servant's affirmation, that she had left the house.—He ran distractedly through every room, calling on his dear Charlotte's name; and crying out, It is impossible! she must be here!—O do not kill me, for thy sport, my love! But when he found his search was vain, he retired to his house, in a state very little short of distraction.

THE moment our fair fugitive landed, at Calais, she wrote a letter, to each of her parents, filled with expressions of the humblest duty, and tenderest affection. She acquainted them with the death of her supposed mother, and mentioned her obligations to her, with the highest gratitude, and esteem. She implored their permission, to throw herself at their feet, and that they would allow her a happiness, she had been so long deprived of, that of receiving a parent's blessing.

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 179

IN vain was her tender and virtuous mind, enriched with every noble and generous sentiment, that could do honour to humanity; her cruel parents were, literally, in the state of the *deaf adder*: they shut their ears and eyes, to her perfections; and refused to receive the highest pleasure, that human nature is capable of, that of beholding an amiable, and accomplished child.

As soon as she arrived at the hotel Angloise, she found a servant waiting with a letter for her, which contained these words.

“ CHARLOTTE BEAUMONT,

“ YOU are commanded to accompany
“ the bearer of this, who will conduct you
“ to an apartment, that is provided for your
“ reception, this night. To-morrow, a carriage shall attend, to convey you to the convent of St. Anthony. — The general is too much indisposed to see you, at present; —
“ when he is able, he will call on you, there.

“ An implicit obedience to our orders,
“ which particularly enjoin the strictest secrecy,
“ in regard to your connexion with us, can

180 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ only prove the truth of those professions of
“ duty, which you have made.

“ You are still to appear in the state of an
“ orphan, which can be no great difficulty,
“ to one who has so lately known that she
“ has parents. If you have brought a ser-
“ vant, she must be dismissed, to-morrow, and
“ sent back to England. If you have occasion
“ for money, the bearer will supply you.

“ Adieu.

“ C. DE BEAUMONT.”

UPON reading this letter, all the tender ideas of filial affection, which had thronged about poor Charlotte's heart, seemed to vanish, and the poignant anguish she had felt, at tearing herself from her fond and generous lover, returned, with double force.

SHE, however, determined not to halt, at beginning the race; and turning to her conductor, with the utmost mildness and resignation, said she was ready to attend him; and hoped, when she was lodged for the night, he would do her the favour to wait, till she should write a few lines to madame de Beaumont.

He

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 181

He told her, he was ordered not to bring back any letter, or message, and hoped she would not take his refusal ill, as he durst not venture to disobey.—The tears now forced their way into Charlotte's eyes. She told the servant she would not be the cause of his disobedience, on any account; and that she was ready to follow him.

He put her and her maid, into a chariot, and directed the coachman where he was to go. When they alighted, she was shewn into a very elegant apartment; and her conductor, after inquiring whether she wanted money, or any farther assistance from him, being answered in the negative, bowed, and withdrew.

As soon as he was gone, the now miserable Charlotte gave vent to all her sorrows; she threw herself upon the ground, and washed it with her tears. Her affectionate servant, who had lived with her from her infancy, without knowing the cause of her distress, vainly endeavoured to console her; intreated her to return to England; and talked of lord Seymour's love and constancy.

HER

182 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

HER every word struck daggers, to the unhappy Charlotte's heart.—As soon as she was able to speak, she told her maid she must part with her, the next day; that she had determined to go into a convent, for some time; and advised her to set out, immediately, for London. The poor girl, who truly loved her, was almost distracted, at seeing and hearing her mistress look and speak so: and positively declared she would never leave her, let her determination in life, be what it may.

CHARLOTTE peremptorily insisted on discharging her, from her service; but told her she would support her, in Paris, while her money lasted, and that she might, sometimes, see her, at the convent. This, in some measure, quieted the poor servant's anxiety; but Charlotte's unhappiness increased, every hour.—She went not to bed, and the pearly drops remained on her fair cheek, when the sun had exhaled those of the dew.

SHE wrote a few lines, to let lord Seymour know, that she was going into the convent of St. Anthony; and, in her distraction, gave the
the

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 183

the letter to her maid, to deliver; without reflecting, that the faithful Nannette had resolved not to quit Paris, till her mistress's fate was determined.

IN the morning she dressed herself, and endeavoured to assume an air of composure and tranquillity, with a breaking heart. About ten o'clock, the same person, who had attended her, the night before, came in a coach, accompanied by madame de Beaumont's woman, who presented her with the following letter :

“ CHARLOTTE,

“ BOTH the general, and I, are much
“ pleased with the accounts we have received,
“ of your behaviour. Any remonstrance
“ against our commands, would be, at once,
“ presumptuous and vain. Continue, there-
“ fore, to deserve our favour, by a silent
“ and unlimited obedience.

“ YOU are already informed, that the
“ general has devoted you to heaven.—Let
“ not his will, who has an absolute power
“ over you, appear severe. A convent is
“ the only place, where true happiness is to
be

184 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

" be found.—That you may meet it there,
" sincerely wishes

" C. DE BEAUMONT.

" P. S. You are expected to enter upon
" your noviciate, immediately."

CHARLOTTE received this cruel sentence, with amazing fortitude. To her perturbed and wretched state of mind, the quiet asylum of a cloister, appeared not undelightful; and had not her passion for lord Seymour, revolted against the severity of her doom, she might have been led, like a lamb to the sacrifice, without a sigh, or groan.

MADAME de Beaumont's last letter seemed less *farouche*, than her former one; and this encouraged Charlotte to hope, that time and her obedience, might possibly awaken the tender feelings of maternal love, in her hitherto obdurate breast. She again inquired, whether she might not be permitted to return her thanks, for madame de Beaumont's favour, in writing? and was again answered in the negative.

SHE took a most affectionate leave of her disconsolate maid, who followed the coach,

at

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 185

at a distance, and saw her enter those gates, through which she was never to pass, again.

WHEN they had arrived at the convent, madame de Beaumont's woman presented Charlotte to the abbess, as a willing victim. She was, therefore, received with every outward mark of esteem; and the grossest flattery was lavished by the whole sisterhood, on those charms, which they vainly imagined an acceptable sacrifice, to the great Creator of them.

DELUDED mortals!—the heart alone is all that he requires! nor do the tender charities of life, the love of parents, husband, brethren, children, pollute the oblation, but render it more pleasing, in his sight, who first ordained, then sanctified, these natural ties.

CHARLOTTE shewed not the least reluctance, at entering on her probation.—She knew that a year must elapse, before she could be compelled to take the veil; and still flattered herself, that fate would dispose of her, in another way, before that time should expire. She imagined, that by a seeming acquiescence, she might be able to lessen,

lessen, if not intirely remove, any restraint they might otherwise have imposed on her.

SHE made no doubt, that lord Seymour's passion would prompt him to pursue her; and she fully determined to acquaint him with every circumstance of her life, if she should ever have an opportunity. For this purpose, she employed every leisure moment, she was mistress of, in framing a little history, from the papers she had found in the cabinet, with the additional circumstances, that had happened, from the time of her leaving London.

As she scarce ever appeared in the parlour, or at the grate, the sisterhood beheld her as the paragon of sanctity; and her edifying example was quoted as a pattern, for all the young ladies in the convent. The little task she had imposed on herself, by amusing her mind, kept up her spirits, so that she seemed to have acquired a constant habit of cheerfulness.

BUT when her work was finished, and two months had elapsed, without hearing from her father, mother, or, what was far more interesting, her lover, she fell into a lowness of spirits,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 187

spirits, which terminated in a slow fever. She now looked upon herself as abandoned by all the world; and the cruel suspicion of lord Seymour's inconstancy, perfectly reconciled her, to the gloomy prospect of perpetual seclusion.

HER faithful servant continued to see her, frequently, and, as often, mingled her tears, with those of her unhappy mistress. As she was, one day, musing on the uncommon miseries of her fate, her maid approached her with unusual cheerfulness, and cried out, O, madam! he is come.

A TRANSITORY joy now sparkled in Charlotte's lovely eyes, and the soft bloom, that had forsook her cheek, returned with added blushes. Where is he? she replied; and ah! how could he stay, so long! Didst thou see him Nannette, and has he mourned my absence?

AT that instant, one of the lay-sisters came to inform Charlotte, that a gentleman desired to see her. She flew to the grate, but how was her surprize increased, when instead of lord Seymour, she beheld her brother?

IF

188 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

IF any thing could have abated her joy at seeing him, it must have been the disappointment she felt, at not meeting lord Seymour. But though her expectation had been highly raised, with the pleasing hope of such an interview, she was sincerely rejoiced at the unexpected sight of her much-loved brother.

HE immediately began to expostulate with her, on her quitting England; and earnestly intreated her to leave the convent, and put herself under his protection. She told him that was not, at present, in her power, as she was then in her noviciate, but promised not to take the veil, without his approbation, which she was certain would follow every action of her life, when he was acquainted with their motives; and, in order to explain, both her situation, and his own, she would send him some papers to peruse, which were of the utmost consequence, to them both.

CAPTAIN Beaumont was astonished at the mysterious manner which accompanied his sister's words; but, as he had the highest opinion of her honour, and understanding, he, for the present, suppressed his curiosity, about the secrets she hinted at, and retired to

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 189

to his lodgings, to wait till Nannette should bring an explanation of the mystery, in which he found his innocent and unhappy sister involved.

CAPTAIN Beaumont had left London, the day after his sister, and easily traced her through the progress of her journey; but when he arrived, at Paris, as he had no clue to guide him, he wandered, near three months, in pursuit of her, and but for the accidental meeting of Nannette, in the street, he might have spent as many years, in the same fruitless inquiry.

LORD Seymour, whose ardour and impatience to recover his lost fair one, was even more sanguine than a brother's could be, was not so early in his pursuit. The agitation of his mind, upon receiving Charlotte's letter, had thrown him into a violent fever, and it was above three weeks, before he was able to follow his fair fugitive.

WHEN he came to Paris, he was as much at a loss to direct his inquiries, as her brother had been—he had heard of her, along the road, and also of captain Beaumont's following

following her; and from the description he received of him, had no doubt of his being the same person he had seen at her house, the day she left it.

Love and jealousy are twins, and it is impossible to defend the heart, from one, if you admit the other. It was apparent to him that this person, and Charlotte, were connected; and his never having seen or heard of him, increased his apprehensions of his being a favoured lover. Yet why! if that were the case, should Charlotte continue to deceive him? why write such a tender and affectionate adieu? He knew not, unless it were, to lull his fears to sleep, and prevent his endangering her lover's safety. Thus did the unhappy Seymour increase his own calamities, and drag about a wretched, lifeless form, to every public place, in Paris, in the fond hope of meeting those transcendent charms, that were now buried in a cloister.

THE sight of her brother, had raised poor Charlotte's spirits, by reviving her hopes of getting out of the convent. Yet of what use, would she exclaim, is liberty, without love? Seymour abandons me, and the world
itself

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 191

itself is now become a solitude to me, more gloomy, even than this cell. But grant his love and constancy should still subsist, and that moment, as wretched as myself, could he receive into his family, the *natural*, and *rejected* daughter, of such cruel parents! No, there is no resource for me, on earth; these walls, for ever, must confine this hapless frame; my heart alone is free, and flies, of course, to him!

As soon as she had leisure, she inclosed mademoiselle de Beaumont's papers, her father and mother's pictures, with a letter from herself, to her brother, acquainting him with every thing that had passed, since her arrival in France, and intreating him not to mention the affinity between them, at the convent, lest it should give offence to their parents, and occasion their being restrained from seeing each other, for the future. She earnestly implored his protection and assistance, toward releasing her from the state she was in, and promised to be guided by him, in every action of her life.

NOTWITHSTANDING the inhuman treatment, that Charlotte had met with, on perusing

rufing the papers, captain Beaumont was transported, at finding himself fo nearly related to the general—the pride of blood is inherent; and the fanguine hopes of preferment, from fuch a high defcent, dazzled his reafon. He flew directly to his fifter, and told her, with the precipitancy natural to a young man, that he was rejoiced at this difcovery, and would go, immediately, and throw himfelf at his father's feet, without having the leaft doubt of a favourable reception.

IN vain Charlotte remonftrated againft fuch an unadvised proceeding, and mentioned the humility of her own conduct, and the feverity of her parents, notwithstanding; in order to deter him, from making the experiment. She feared that his approaching the general, without any introduction, would be conftrued into want of refpect, and that fhe fhould be condemned, for informing him that he had a right to do fo—but he was not to reftained.

SHE paffed the night under the moft gloomy apprehenfions, yet would often fay to herfelf, what have I to fear? can I be made more wretched? let me, then, receive the

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 193

only consolation that remains for misery like mine, the knowing that any change must be for the better. Hapless maid ! a change will come, that shall render your present state, by sad comparison, a scene of soft tranquillity and ease.

THE next evening, on being informed that captain Beaumont was in the parlour, she flew to receive him ; and after asking a thousand questions, with her eyes and tongue, she laid her cheek close to the grate, to listen to his answers. At that instant, she beheld lord Seymour entering the room. The agitation of her mind was now increased, almost to distraction : she knew not what she said, or did ; and was utterly incapable of expressing the joy she felt, at seeing the dear idol of her soul. Her brother appeared dejected, and unhappy ; and the mistaken Seymour attributed her confusion, and his melancholy, to motives, which their souls were strangers to.

WE have already hinted, that jealousy had infected his noble nature ; but his seeing the object of it, with the woman he adored, added a thousand stings ; and he now felt, in the supremest degree, its poignant

anguish. His behaviour to Charlotte, was constrained, and cold. He told her he was indebted to that gentleman, pointing to her brother, for the happiness of seeing her : as he could not easily forget his having met him, at her house, the morning she left London, he naturally supposed he could inform him where she was ; and having accidentally seen him, just then, enter the convent, he had taken the liberty to inquire for her, and hoped she would pardon his intrusion. He added, that he should leave Paris, in a few days, and desired to know if she had any commands, to England.

THOUGH Charlotte was astonished. at his behaviour, she had, however, penetration enough, to discover the cause, and said, she hoped she should be able to prevail on him to prolong his stay, as she flattered herself with the thoughts of returning to England, in a few months, and should wish to have him for her conductor.

HE bowed, and replied, he should think himself happy to be of any service to her, provided he did not interfere, with another person's right ; but, as he believed that gentleman

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 195

tleman was her chief motive, for visiting France, he was, doubtless, intitled to the honour of attending her to England, or wherever else she pleased.

CHARLOTTE was rendered miserable, by lord Seymour's suspicions; yet, as there was other company in the parlour, she knew not how to obviate them, as she was yet ignorant, whether she might dare to own captain Beaumont for her brother. The latter was much surprized, at lord Seymour's manner.—He knew not of any connection, between Charlotte and him, and thought her rather too condescending.

THE rest of the time they staid, was passed in a constrained, and difficult situation. However, Charlotte found, and seized an opportunity, of speaking the words, which are quoted in her letter to lord Seymour, already related *, before the gentlemen withdrew.

“ My dearest Henry, let not appearances
“ disturb your mind; I can, and will, ac-
“ count, for every action of my life, to you.—
“ Let your servant attend, at the grate, to-
K 2 “ morrow,

* Page 110. part 4.

“morrow, for a letter from me, and you
 “shall be fully satisfied.”

THOUGH Charlotte's mind was perplexed with a thousand doubts, and fears, both for her brother, and herself, the transport of having seen lord Seymour, triumphed over them all; and she, once again, enjoyed a transient gleam of happiness. She knew it was in her power, to remove all his suspicions: she neither doubted his love, nor honour; and was certain he would assist her in getting out of the convent, should they attempt to compel her to take the veil.

AFTER writing a few lines to lord Seymour, and making up her packet for him, she lay down to rest, with a heart more at ease, than she had ever felt, since the death of mademoiselle de Beaumont. But the bell had no sooner rung for mattins, than she was presented with the following note:

“My dearest CHARLOTTE,

“I DIE, by lord Seymour's hand;—some
 “fatal mistake has caused this tragedy. If
 “he is your friend, let him fly, to preserve
 “the

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 197

" the only one, you have now left. My
" cruel parents will rejoice at my fate, and
" I only lament it, for your sake.

" Adieu, I fear, for ever.

" CHARLES BEAUMONT."

NOTHING, but the immediate loss of her senses, could have preserved her life.—She sunk, motionless, upon the ground; and nature, by being totally overpowered, afforded some little respite to her distracted mind. She remained in this situation, till the nuns, alarmed at her absence from chapel, came to seek her, in her cell. But when their cruel care had brought her so far back, as to shew some signs of life, she could neither speak, nor weep. She appeared like grief personified. She neither beat her bosom, rent her hair, or committed any act of outrage, but continued almost immovable, till a letter was brought her, from madame de Beaumont, which contained these words :

" ACCURSED be the hour, that gave thee
" birth, and doubly cursed the moment,
" when thy pretended filial piety brought thee
" back to France, to ruin and destroy the

198 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ peace of them, who had been blessed, if
 “ thou hadst never been born! Why, par-
 “ ricide, and fratricide in one, didst thou
 “ inform the unhappy wretch, who is now
 “ fallen a victim to thy vices, of his affinity
 “ to us? Thy father never will surmount
 “ the shock which he received from seeing
 “ him, and, with his latest breath, will curse
 “ thee, for being the cause of his, and thy
 “ brother’s death.

“ BUT thou, I doubt not, triumphest in thy
 “ wickedness, and fondly hopest to wed the
 “ murderer of thy brother. But here thy
 “ crimes shall end.—Thou shalt, immediately,
 “ be conveyed to *La Salpetriere*, and made
 “ sensible of the unmerited kindness, thou
 “ hast hitherto received, by the severities
 “ thou shalt hereafter experience.

“ C. B.”

WE might suppose, that when the un-
 happy Charlotte had read her brother’s note,
 her miseries could scarce admit addition; but
 her inhuman mother’s letter convinced her,
 that the cup of sorrow, though seemingly
 brimfull, is always capable of increase.

SHE

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 199

SHE was seized with inexpressible terrors, at the thoughts of being sent to *La Salpêtrière*. She was sensible that the abbess, and nuns, where she then was, had treated her with the utmost kindness: for, as they looked upon her as a voluntary victim, she had never experienced the least restraint, but what the common rules of the house prescribed. She had been accustomed to the tenderest treatment, all her life; and her present melancholy situation demanded it, more than ever.

AFTER perusing the cruel anathema, that doomed her to still greater miseries, she flew into the abbess's apartment, and prostrating herself before her, with a flood of tears implored her pity, and protection. The good woman was moved, at her distress; and raising her from the ground, assured her that no authority, except the express order of the king, should force her from that house; and that if her enemies should attempt to procure a mandate, by any false representation, she would exert her utmost interest, to protect her.

CHARLOTTE now considered the absolute impossibility, of any future connection with
K 4 lord.

lord Seymour, and therefore looked upon her continuance in the convent, of *St. Anthony*, as an asylum, most devoutly to be wished for. She thanked the abbess, on her knees; and would, at that instant, have taken the veil, without repining, if they could have abridged the time of her probation.

SHE had now no longer any terms to keep, with madame de Beaumont; and therefore mentioned the misfortune her brother had met with, and entreated the abbess's permission, to send hourly, to inquire his health. Her request was granted; and she retired to her cell, in some degree less wretched, than she had left it.

BUT when her tortured imagination represented her still dear lord Seymour, as the executioner of her brother, her grief was without bounds. Yes, she would say, I am, indeed, accursed! well does my mother stile me so.—Yet are they cruel words, to pass maternal lips! Oh! had she but once blessed me, I could not be the wretch I am.

IT is impossible to describe the various emotions of her distracted mind; yet still love

re-

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 201

remained triumphant ; and she strove, in vain, to pursue what she thought the dictates of her duty, the hating of lord Seymour.

CAPTAIN Beaumont continued to languish, without hopes, for near three months ; during which time, she received the following letter, from lord Seymour.

To Mademoiselle de BEAUMONT.

“ CONVINCED as I am, that I have
“ given you cause to detest the name of him,
“ who now presumes to address you, I would
“ not, madam, intrude upon your sorrows,
“ but to offer you the only atonement,
“ which you can receive, from such a wretch
“ as me.

“ I MEAN to inform you, madam, that I
“ do not intend to fly from justice ; I knew
“ the severity of the laws, when I incurred
“ their censure : and the moment that pre-
“ cious life is ended, which I have robbed
“ you of, I mean to offer up my own,
“ worthless as it is, in order to expiate, as

K 5

“ far

202 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ far as is now possible, the crime of having
“ rendered you unhappy.

“ BUT Oh, my dearest Charlotte ! may I not
“ hope, that when my blood has washed away
“ my stains, exhausted as the fountains of thy
“ beauteous eyes may be, with grief for my
“ too happy rival, thou then mayst spare one
“ tear, to the sad memory of the lost,
“ SEYMOUR.”

THERE wanted but this last stroke, to render Charlotte the veriest wretch on earth. She had flattered herself, that lord Seymour had quitted *France*, immediately after the duel, and that his life, at least, was safe ; and that, at some time, or other, she should be able to convince him of his error, and her innocence. But now she beheld him, wilfully devoting himself to the rack, and suffering torture, greater than even that can inflict, from his mistaken opinion of her inconstancy.

IT was impossible that her delicate frame could longer support the complicated agonies, that assailed her mind. She fell into a raging fever :

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 203

fever: during her delirium, she raved incessantly, of racks, and gibbets, of snatching Seymour from them, and suffering in his place. At length, however, the natural goodness of her constitution, and her blooming youth, surmounted this dreadful disorder, and her reason and wretchedness returned, together.

THE first gleam of peace, that broke through the horrors of her fate, were some small hopes, of her brother's recovery; and in consequence of those hopes, she, by a solemn vow, devoted herself to heaven, if it should be pleased to spare his life. But not all her religion and virtue, could prevent her as firmly resolving, not to outlive lord Seymour, should he suffer.

As soon as captain Beaumont was able to sit up in his bed, he wrote to his loved sister, congratulating her on his deliverance from death, and exculpating lord Seymour, as far as possible, by condemning himself, for not avowing the relation between him and Charlotte, before their engagement; but from a false punctilio, he had thought it beneath an officer, to use any argument in his defence,

except his sword; and, therefore, by his manner, had rather confirmed lord Seymour in his error, of supposing him his rival, than undeceived him; for which he begged both his lordship's, and his sister's pardon.

HE then gave her an account of the interview he had with his father, and of the disgust, and surprize, which the general expressed, at seeing him; and that he had, peremptorily, commanded him to quit Paris, and join his regiment, immediately; and farther informed him, that if he attempted to disobey, he would have him broke, with infamy.

HE said he had, however, reason to hope, that the misfortune he had met with, had softened his father's heart, as he had been attended, during his illness, by the first surgeons in Paris, who came to his assistance, unsent for, and unpaid, by him; and that if his sufferings had made his father relent, he should, for ever, bless the hand, that had inflicted them.

THE pleasing hopes of her brother's recovery, was the most healing balm that could have

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 205

have been administred, to Charlotte's wounded heart. She no longer trembled for his life, or what was dearer still, lord Seymour's; and she began, in some measure, to be reconciled to her fate, meerly by reflecting, that it might have been more wretched.

NOTWITHSTANDING all her efforts to conquer it, her passion for lord Seymour, remained undiminished, and she would have given worlds, had she been mistress of them, to undeceive him. But though her faithful Nannette, had made the most diligent search for him, from the time that captain Beaumont was pronounced out of danger, she could not discover his retreat.

THE time now approached, for Charlotte's fulfilling the vow she had made to heaven, by taking the veil. The cruel madame de Beaumont had made several fruitless efforts to prevail on the abbess to suffer her removal to another convent; but as she feared to appear publickly in soliciting it, lest the affinity between them, should be revealed, she, at last, contented herself with endeavouring to enforce the utmost strictness and severity, which their rules would admit of; with which
the

the poor innocent sacrifice unreluctantly complied.

As soon as captain Beaumont was tolerably recovered, he wrote again to his sister, to inform her, that he had received an order from his colonel, to join his regiment, immediately; and, at the same time, a positive command from his father, to leave Paris, without seeing her. He conjured her, in the strongest terms, to renounce the veil, and fly to lord Seymour, for protection; and told her he was certain, that his lordship was still in Paris, as he had just then discovered, that he was the person, who appointed, and paid the surgeons, for their attendance on him.

THE fair disconsolate was now so enured to affliction, that she bore this fresh mark of her parents inhumanity, with gentleness and resignation; but alas! there was a woe, superior far, to all they could inflict, and which, like Aaron's rod, had swallowed up the rest. Lord Seymour thought her guilty, still!

SHE had preserved the packet she had made up for him, on the evening of their last interview;

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 207

interview ; and on the day preceding that, on which she was to make her vows, she received the following lines from him.

To Mademoiselle de BEAUMONT.

“ THOUGH I approach you now, with
“ less terror, madam, than when I last pre-
“ sumed to address you, still does my beat-
“ ing heart, and trembling hand, avow your
“ power, and amply revenge your suffer-
“ ings, on the wretch who dared to offend
“ you. But, since it has pleased heaven, to
“ repair the cruel injury I did you, by re-
“ storing my rival to your prayers, and
“ wishes, will not the gentle Charlotte con-
“ descend, to pardon, and pity, the unhappy
“ man, who once thought (fatal delusion!)
“ himself honoured with her love?

“ I FLY from Paris, madam, from the sad
“ scene of all my sorrows ; but they, alas !
“ will be companions of my flight. Yet
“ let me take one blessing with me, a last, if
“ not a kind, adieu, from you.

“ As you talked of returning to England, I
“ never will revisit it—the sight of the de-
“ tested

208 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

“ tested Seymour, no more shall shock your
 “ eyes, or damp your joys—but let me wander
 “ where I will, the warmest effusions of this
 “ still doating heart, shall, to its latest throb,
 “ be poured forth, in blessings on, Ah! I had
 “ like to have said, *my angel* Charlotte! My
 “ hand refuses longer to obey its wretched
 “ master, and I can hardly say,

“ Adieu.

“ SEYMOUR.”

AFFECTED as the tender heart of Charlotte was, at her loved Seymour's deep distress, she felt a momentary joy, at the thought of being able to recover his esteem, by proving herself worthy of his love. She instantly sat down, and with inexpressible anguish, wrote the letter *, which has been already related, and inclosed it, with the narrative she had before written of her life, to lord Seymour.

THIS dreadful conflict past, she felt a dawn of peace, beam on her mind; and immediately gave orders, that no letter, or message, should be brought to her. She passed the night in fervent prayer, and at the break
 of

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 209

of day, summoned her young companions in the convent, to adorn her for the sacrifice, with all the dignified composure, with which a queen puts on her regal robes.

HER conduct, during the awful ceremony, has been already described, by lord Seymour; and sure a heart, more truly virtuous, or a form more exquisitely fair, were never offered up, at any shrine! And may that gracious power, to whom they are devoted, bless all her future days, with that "sweet peace, which goodness, bosoms ever."

LET

L E T T E R XXIV.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

THAT my dear Emily may not again reproach me, for attending equally to *foreign*, and *domestic* affairs, I shall answer her two last letters, before I speak my sentiments of the truly amiable, and unhappy Charlotte Beaumont. And first, of the first—Though you have desired me not to reply to it, I find the subject so very interesting, and alarming, that I cannot, in justice to you, or myself, comply with your request—

You certainly must have lived, some days, upon essence of tea, and reduced your nerves to the lowest state, imaginable, before your mind could be affected, by the circumstance you mention. Not that I would insinuate that lord Woodville's sudden confusion, was not the effect of a quick recollection, or consciousness of some former scene, which he, perhaps, might wish to have forgot. In all probability, it arose from the remembrance, of some disastrous love adventure, which obtruded itself, involuntarily, upon his mind.

THIS

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 211

THIS point, which you have barely hinted at, I shall take for granted; and then endeavour to shew you the absurdity of being alarmed, on such an occasion. Lord Woodville is now in his eight-and-twentieth year, and has lived, both in foreign courts, and at home, as much in the gay world, as any man in England.—And can my dear Emily really suppose, that she was the first object of his love?—Impossible! It is much more reasonable to imagine, that he had felt that passion, half a dozen times, at least, before she was out of her hanging sleeves.

BUT all girls flatter themselves with the intire possession, of an husband's heart; which, if he happens, as in your case, to be seven or eight years older than her, is no more in his power to bestow, than youth or beauty. But if he generously grants you all that remains at that time in his gift, you have not the least right to complain; and this, I firmly believe, lord Woodville has done. Beware, then, my Emily, of appearing ungrateful for this present; nor let him ever see that you do not consider, even the remnant of his heart, as a full equivalent, for all your own. This I must confess to be a very unequal

equal lot of affections; but the conditions of life, should be acquiesced in, without too much refining.—

THERE never was an higher instance of delicacy, than lord Woodville's behaviour to you, in consequence of the temple adventure; but do not give him too frequent opportunities, of exerting his galantry:—you are a musical lady; and know that a string may be strained, till it breaks. I am perfectly acquainted with the tenderness, and sensibility, of your nature; but you are not to judge of others, by your own fine feelings; or think your husband deficient in affection, if he is not so minutely attentive to trifling circumstances, as your delicacy may prompt you to expect.

LES petits soins belong, most properly, to female life: the great cares of the world, are load sufficient, for the ablest man. I have now done chiding, I hope, for ever, as I never can be angry with my Emily, but when she wounds herself.

THE description of your rural entertainment, pleased me much.—Whenever I go to
Woodfort,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 213

Woodfort, you shall take me to see your *pocket Arcadia*—No, upon second thoughts, the scene would be incomplete, without a swain; I therefore desire you will present my compliments to Sir James Thornton, and tell him, that I appoint him my *Cecisbeo*, for that party, if we should ever happen to meet at your house.

I AM not at all sorry that lord Seymour has left you.—The constant anguish which he must ever feel, was sufficient to infect ye all. This naturally leads me to the charming nun.—I cannot forgive your want of ingenuoufness, in not mentioning the million of tears, her story must have cost you—there never was any thing more affecting—Lucy and I, read, and wept, by turns—When one of us began to falter, the other endeavoured to relieve her; but there were many passages, that neither of us could repeat aloud, and only gazed silently on, through the dim medium of our tears.

It really requires a perfect certainty of the facts, to suppose there ever were such monsters, in nature, as the general, and madame de Beaumont. But Charlotte's unhappy

214 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

fate is but too strong a voucher of their inhumanity. Yet miserable, as the lovely vestal is, I think lord Seymour much more wretched—Time, devotion, and a thorough consciousness of the rectitude of all her actions, may calm her sorrows; whilst his must, for ever, be aggravated, by knowing that he has rendered her unhappy. I think him truly to be pitied. Adieu, my Emily—Loves, and good wishes, from all here, accompany this to Woodfort.

F. STRAFFON.

L E T.

LETTER XXV.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

I HAVE, at present, a house full of company ; and therefore must content myself with barely acknowledging the receipt of my dear Fanny's friendly admonitions, which I frankly admit to be just, though I feel they are severe. Call me no more a spoiled child, when I so readily embrace the rod.

LADY Lawson has been here, these three days. There have been odd reports, about Sir William and the young lady I formerly mentioned to you, who went to London, a few days before him. But I am persuaded they are false ; for on Sir William's return, last night, lady Lawson received him with the most genuine, and unaffected delight, that could be expressed, in looks, or words ; and I hear that miss Fanning (that is the lady's name) is to return to Lawson-Hall, in a few days. The knight appeared a little embarrassed ; but that might be owing to the meeting his lady in so much company :

company : we were all assembled at tea, and knew nothing of his return.

YOU must not expect me to be a constant correspondent, from York : the fatigue of dressing twice, nay, perhaps, thrice, a day, will afford me but little time, for more rational entertainment. There are no moments which I think so totally lost, as those spent at the toilette ; but the customs of whatever place we are in, must be complied with. Your Emily has not resolution sufficient to stem a torrent, and must, therefore, always be carried away with the stream. I will, however, keep a sort of journal of the occurrences of each day, and you must accept of that, in lieu of my letters.

MY reason for not avowing how much I was affected, by the story of the nun, was to avoid taking off that surprize, which gives strength to every emotion.—When we are told that a tragedy is extremely tragical, we summon our resolution, to oppose the feelings of our hearts ; and frequently suffer our pride to conquer its most graceful weakness : whereas, when we are
taken

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 217

taken by surprize, we give nature fair play,
and do not attempt to combat with our
humanity.

**ADIEU, my dear Fanny! Woodfort sin-
cerely repays all the loves, and good wishes,
of Straffon-Hill.**

E. WOODVILLE.

L E T T E R XXVI.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

I OUGHT, perhaps, to be more thankful to my dear Emily, for her last short letter, than for any other she has written to me. There is, certainly, the highest degree of merit, in giving pleasure to others, when the effort is attended with trouble, or difficulty, to ourselves. The bestowing a quarter of an hour, upon an absent friend, while we are surrounded with the cheerful gaiety of present ones, should always be considered as an high compliment.

You may see, by this remark, that I set a proper value upon your kind attention; but I am still more charmed with your condescension, in admitting the justness of my arguments. Believe me, my dear, if we wish to be happy, we must make it a constant rule to turn away our eyes, even from the minutest failings of those we love; the suffering our thoughts to dwell long upon them,

7

must

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 219

must insensibly lessen our affection, and, of course, our felicity.

THERE cannot, in my mind, be a more pitiable object, than a virtuous woman, who ceases to love her husband.—What a dreadful vacuity must she feel in her heart! How coldly, and insipidly, must her life pass away, who is merely actuated by duty, unanimated by love!

WHERE there never has been passion, there may, for ought I know, be a kind of mixed sensation, compounded of esteem, and mutual interest, that supplies the place of affection, to the insensible part of mankind.—If this were not the case, the generality of married people, could not live so well together, as they do.—But this wretched substitute will never answer, to man, or woman, who has once truly loved.

I WOULD, therefore, most earnestly recommend it to all those, who are so happy as to be united to the objects of their choice, to set the merits and attractions of each other, in the fairest point of view, to them-

selves, and never, even for a moment, to cast their eyes on *the wrong side of the tapestry*.

YOUR account of the kindness, with which lady Lawton received her wandering swain, very fully proves that she is an excellent wife; but is, by no means, a refutation of the reports relative to him, and miss Fanning. Your ignorance of the world, and its ways, make such scenes appear extraordinary to you.—But, alas! they are too frequent, to be wondered at, in such times as these.

I SHALL not, my dear Emily, insist upon your writing, from York, if it is inconvenient to you: but as Fanny Weston tells Lucy, that you do not set out from Woodfort, this fortnight, every day of which, I dare say, she thinks a year, I may flatter myself with the hopes of hearing from you, perhaps more than once, before you go.

THAT surprize increases our emotions, I readily admit; but, as you had no reason to doubt the tenderness of Lucy's nature, or
mine,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 221

mine, you might have communicated your own sensations, without fear of abating ours.

SIR John is gone to London, for a short time; and Lucy and I are to spend the days of his absence, not in retirement, as you might possibly suppose, but in discharging a heavy debt of visits, which we owe to all the neighbourhood, for five miles round. I think there are few small evils that torture us so much, as what is generally called a good neighbourhood, in the country.

ADIEU, my dear Emily. I feel myself peevish, at the idea of squandering my time, with persons that I have not the least wish to converse with, and asking simple questions, without the smallest desire to be informed. But as the world is constituted, we must compound for spending some part of our lives disagreeably, and endeavour to make ourselves what amends we can, by enjoying that portion of it, which is left to our own disposal.

222 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

HEALTH, and her fair handmaid, cheerfulness, attend my dearest Emily.

F. STRAFFON.

LET.

LETTER XXVII.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

MY dear Fanny is extremely kind, in seeming to set so high a value upon my small, or rather no, merit, in writing to her; for, indeed, I can never claim any, for what is to me the highest self-indulgence.— So a truce with your compliments, my too civil sister.

Do not be angry, Fanny; but I really cannot think with you, that true affection should be founded on illusion, which must be the case, if we are to be totally blind to the failings of those we love.—On the contrary, I have always considered the raising our ideas, of the persons we are to be united to, too romantically high, as one great source, of matrimonial unhappiness. By that means, we become enamoured of a being, which exists not in nature, and feel ourselves mortified, and displeased, as at a real disappointment, when we discover that our imagination has exceeded the bounds of possibility.

BUT if absolute perfection were to be found on earth, it would wound our self-love; and whatever injures that, can never be, long, dear to us. In the imperfections of our most amiable friends, we find a consolation for our own, which forbids despair, and places the generality of mankind, pretty nearly upon a level. This equality creates confidence, and that, naturally, produces esteem, and love.

As these are my real sentiments, I think I may venture to tell you, that I am very sorry I have never yet been able to discover one failing, in my lord. I declare, Fanny, this is an humiliating situation, to a creature so conscious of a thousand weaknesses, as I am; and, instead of restraining me from searching for his faults, I desire you will, immediately, provide me with a magnifying glass, to assist me in discovering them.

WHAT an horrid idea have you conjured up, of a woman who ceases to love her husband! There can be but two causes in nature, that are capable of producing such an effect—for I talk not of those animals, who never felt passion.—The first of these, must

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 225

must be a constant series of ill treatment, which I suppose may, at length, conquer the tenderest affection; and the unhappy sufferer who continues to act up to her duty, under such circumstances, deserves, in my mind, a much higher fame, than any Greek, or Roman, that ever yet existed.

THE other cause must be owing to a shameful and vicious depravity of heart, commonly called inconstancy; which, to the honour of our sex, I think I may say, is not frequent, amongst us. But when this happens to be the case, there is, generally, some new object, in view; for that despicable wretch, “a woman of galantry, never changes her first love, till she is engaged in a second.”

I THANK heaven for my ignorance of the world, and its ways, as I hope, and believe, I shall never have any trial, that may render a knowledge of them necessary. I know not what to think, with regard to lady Lawson; but, for my own ease, I will hope the best, as it is impossible that I should be indifferent, to any thing that distresses her.

SIR James Thornton has had an ugly fall from his horse, and strained his right arm, but has not received any dangerous hurt, though he is confined to his chamber. Lady Harriet, and Fanny Weston are indefatigable in their attendance on him. I just now received a message from him, to inquire my health; which seems a kind of tacit reproach, for not having been to visit him.—My sister Lawson and I spent all this morning, in designing plans, for a woodhouse;—but as we are neither of us partial to our own inventions, we have laid them by, and determined to be rather good copyists, than bad originals. We have both agreed, that it was impossible to devise any thing more truly elegant, than that on the terrace at *Taplow*, which is to be our model. I have barely time to finish this, to dress, and look in upon Thornton, before dinner. Adieu, my dear Fanny! I may hear from you again, before we set out for York.

Your's, ever,

E. WOODVILLE.

L E T.

L E T T E R XXVIII.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

My dear EMILY,

AS I am perfectly convinced that, in the account of our correspondence, I am much your debtor, on the article of entertainment, I am pleased at having a little adventure to relate to you, though I cannot hope that the recital will afford you as much pleasure, as the action gave me; but you must make the same allowance as you do for a play, in your closet, and furnish out all the scenery, decorations, &c. from the store-house of your own imagination.

My tale runs simply thus—as Lucy and I were returning home, last night, from lady Vaughan's, about eight o'clock, the sky quite dark, and rainy, one of the hind wheels of our chaise, flew off; but as we were travelling, at a very slow pace, in a miry road, we received no hurt from the accident.—We were about three miles, from Straffon hill, which was rather too far for us to walk, as we were, by no means, accoutred for

278 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Peripatetics ; and just as ill qualified for an equestrian expedition ; we, therefore, sent off the postilion, on one of the horses, to bring the coach to us—

WE saw no friendly cottage near ; but, at the distance of a quarter of a mile, in the fields, we perceived a light, which seemed to us bright “ as the Arcadian star, or Tyrian Cynosure.” One of the servants discovered a path, that seemed to lead to the mansion, from whence these charming beams had issued.

WE took him with us, and setting forward, soon reached the small, but hospitable dwelling. When we knocked at the door, a little neat country girl appeared, and after conducting us into a small parlour, said she would acquaint her young lady, that there were strangers there, but that her mistress was at her devotions. We announced ourselves to the girl, and she retired.

I WAS surprized, at this young creature's mode of expression ; she seemed greatly amazed at our appearance, but her astonishment

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 229

ment could only be discovered, by her looks. In a few minutes, an elegant young woman, about eighteen, entered the room, and after saluting us, very gracefully, inquired to what happy accident she was indebted, for the honour of our visit?

THE courtliness of her address, and the ease of her manners, were all new subjects of wonder, both to Lucy and me; which we could not help expressing, after we had informed her of the accident we had met with. She very politely offered us tea, or coffee—we declined both—but there was a much higher treat, in her power, namely, the gratification of our curiosity, which we could not, however, venture to propose.

WHEN we had sat, about a quarter of an hour, the little servant came in, and said her lady was come out of the chapel, and would be glad to see us—we were immediately shewn into a room, the neatness, and elegance of which, it is impossible to describe; at the upper end of it, on a small sofa, sat a woman, with the finest form, though pale and emaciated, that can be imagined.

SHE

230 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

SHE rose to receive us, with such an affable dignity, as at once attracted our respect, and love; she was dressed in black, and appeared to be about five-and-thirty—though she spoke perfect good English, there was just so much of the foreign accent in her utterance, as must prevent your taking her for a native of this country.

OVER the chimney, of the chamber, we sat in, was a picture of a very handsome young man, and at the other end of the room, there hung one of the lady before us, in all the bloom of beauty, with her daughter, then about four years old, by her side, and a boy that looked like a cherubim, seated in her lap.

As I gazed on every object round me, with looks of admiration, which the lady of the house could not help observing, she turned to me, with an engaging smile, and said, the surprize which your ladyship is too polite to express, in words, is so perfectly visible in your countenance, that it would appear like affectation, to seem insensible of it; and as there is no part, either of my past, or present life, that should cause a blush

to glow upon my cheek, I am ready to gratify that curiosity, which the extraordinariness of my situation, seems to have raised.

It will, probably, be near an hour, continued she, before your carriage can arrive, and a much less time will serve to relate the few, though uncommon events, that have placed me in the circumstances you now see me. Both Lucy and I expressed our gratitude, for such an obliging offer, in the warmest terms, and entreated she would proceed—without more ceremony, she began.

I AM a native of Italy, and descended from one of the most ancient families, of the republic of Genoa.—About twenty years ago, I became acquainted with a young English nobleman, called lord Somerville, whose picture you see there (pointing her beautiful hand towards the chimney;) he was then, upon his travels, and under age.—He became passionately in love with me, and soon inspired me with more than gratitude; with honest heart-felt love.

With my permission, he applied to my father, for his consent to our marriage; well knowing

232 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

knowing that he could have no exception, to his birth, or fortune. We had not the least apprehension, of my father's refusal—but we had both forgot, that my lover was an *heretic*. This was deemed by him, so material an objection to our union, that he declared he would confine me to a convent, for life, rather than hazard my salvation, by such a marriage.—My lover was forbidden to repeat his visits, and I was sent about twenty leagues off, into the country.

LORD Somerville soon discovered my retreat, and got access to me, by the treachery, or zeal of a servant, who was intrusted with the care of me. My father was informed of our interviews, and determined to send me, directly, to a convent, at Naples, where an aunt of my mother's, was lady abbess. A particular accident let me into the secret of my intended doom, and I no longer hesitated to prefer love and liberty, to cruelty and confinement. After lord Somerville had given me the most solemn assurances, that I should preserve my religion inviolate, we were married, and set out, privately, in a felucca, hired for the purpose, which conveyed us to Marseilles.

WHEN

WHEN we came to *Lyons*, we were obliged to wait there, for remittances from England, before we could proceed farther. After having long expected them, in vain, my lord received a very severe, and angry letter, from his father, accusing him with having stolen the daughter of an Italian nobleman, and commanding him to restore me to my parents, and return immediately, to England.

THE distress of my husband's mind, upon this occasion, was not to be concealed; but it was a long time before he acquainted me with the real motives of his concern. Fondly and passionately, as I loved him, I would have torn myself from his arms, and gone into a convent, till his father's resentment might have been appeased, if my condition would have permitted it.

BUT I was then far gone with child, of that young lady before you, and he, in the tenderest manner, assured me, that not even the commands of a father, should have power to force him from me, till he had the happiness of being himself a parent, and of seeing
me

me in a situation to support his absence, or able to travel with him.

WE had lived in the utmost retirement, and privacy, from the time of our arrival at Lyons.—My lord had taken the name of Fortescue, and no creature, except his banker, knew who he was.—We were so perfectly happy, in each other, that we wished for no other society—my lord amused himself, with teaching me English—with such a tutor, I soon became a considerable proficient; and at the time that my Laura was born, I could read, and perfectly understand, the most difficult English authors.

As soon as I was quite recovered, we set out for Paris, where my lord purposed leaving me, while he went over to England, to pay his duty to his father, and to endeavour to reconcile him to our marriage. I will not take up your time, with attempting to describe our mutual sufferings, at our separation; such forms as yours, must have feeling hearts, and you can judge, better than I describe, what we endured.

MY

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 235

My lord remained, above a year, in England, making repeated, but fruitless efforts, to conquer his father's resentment, against a person who had never in thought offended him; but, alas! my being a catholic, was as unpardonable a crime to him, as my dear husband's being a protestant, was to my father. Strange! that the worshippers of one God, and Saviour, whose doctrine was peace, and good-will to men, should feel such enmity, and hatred to each other!

At my lord's return to France, I could not help perceiving a visible change, both in his health, and spirits, though his fondness for me was undiminished; or, if possible, seemed to be increased, by his tenderness for his daughter, who was then near two years old. As my lord concealed great part of his father's unreasonable aversion to me, I was not without hopes that time would conquer his prejudices; which, indeed, I only wished, upon my lord's account; for while I enjoyed the real happiness of his company, there was not a desire of my heart, ungratified.

IN

236 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

IN less than a year, that infant, whose portrait you see there, was born.—From the time of his birth, my lord's health and spirits seemed to revive, and I then certainly reached the zenith of human felicity; alas! how quickly did the wheel turn round, to lay me in the lowest state of misery? With what rapture have I seen him catch the infant in his arms, and say, this boy, this boy, my love, will plead our cause, with my obdurate father, and soften his hard heart? Would he were three years old!—but that blessed time will come; and we shall all be happy.—

WHILE lady Somerville repeated the foregoing words, her countenance became more animated, than it is possible to describe; but a sudden gush of tears, soon dimmed the brilliant lustre of her eyes, and quenched the glowing crimson on her cheek. She rose, and, opening a small folding door, retired into the chapel.

THE young lady sympathized, most sincerely, with her mother's sorrow; and Lucy and I, who were extremely affected, were scarcely capable of making proper apologies, for having been the innocent cause of renewing
both

both the ladies afflictions. Miss Somerville said every thing that politeness could dictate, to make us easy ; and, in a few minutes, lady Somerville returned, with such an air of calmness, and resignation, as amazed me.

I TOOK the liberty of entreating that she would not proceed farther in her story, for the present. But as I could not avoid being extremely anxious, about every circumstance relative to so amiable a person, I requested she would permit me to wait upon her, the next day, or whenever it was most agreeable to her inclination.

SHE told me she was very sensible of the delicacy, and propriety of my request, which she readily assented to, as it promised her the happiness of another interview, with persons, for whose sensibility, and politeness, she had conceived the highest respect : said, she was a little ashamed, that her long acquaintance with grief, had not yet rendered her so familiar with it, as she might naturally be supposed to be ; but hoped we would excuse the sudden emotion, which had, for a few minutes, transported her. She then intreated our company to drink tea, the next evening,
and

238 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

and said she would, if possible, be more composed.

IN about a quarter of an hour, the coach arrived, and we took leave of this charming unfortunate, with the most earnest desire to renew our visit, and the warmest hopes of being serviceable to her, and her daughter.

I AM really fatigued, with this long letter ; but I would not suffer oblivious sleep to steal any part of this extraordinary adventure, from my memory, till I had communicated it to my dear Emily. By next post, you shall have the remainder of the story ; till then, and ever,

I am affectionately your's,

F. STRAFFON.

LET-

LETTER XXIX.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

LUCY and I set out, immediately after dinner, yesterday, and reached lady Somerville's elegant cottage, before five o'clock. As we approached it by day-light, we discovered many beauties that had been hidden from us, by the dun shades of night; particularly, several small clumps of trees, that were encircled with woodbines, orange and lemon gourds, and intermixed with a great variety of flowering shrubs:—a small, but neat garden, at the bottom of which ran a rivulet, so clear, and sparkling, as to appear like liquid diamonds.

As we drove by the pales of the garden, we perceived a building in it, that seemed to be fitted up for a gardener's house; and, to our great astonishment, beheld a man, of a very respectable appearance, about sixty years of age, seated in an arbour, with a book in his hand. We were received by both the ladies, with the same politeness and affability, as the day before. The folding doors, which
led

led to the chapel, stood open; and, indeed, Emily, there is no describing the elegance, with which the altar is adorned.

I AM an enemy to all devotional parade: yet I could not help considering the decorations, of this sacred spot, rather as the offerings of the heart, to heaven, than a sacrifice to vanity, as all the ornaments that are placed there, were the work of lady Somerville's, and her daughter's hands.

As soon as tea and coffee were removed, lady Somerville, without waiting to be intreated, proceeded in her narrative, thus.—When I mentioned my having reached the pinnacle of human felicity, I forgot to inform you, that my father had been reconciled to me, for some time; and, on the birth of my son, had presented me with his picture, set with diamonds, and desired the portrait of my lord, and those of my children.

BUT, before this request could be complied with, I had the misfortune to lose my only parent.—His death was sudden; and he died without a will. This was the first real affliction I had ever known; and my lord, in order

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 241

order to divert my melancholy, proposed our going to the south of France.

I ACQUIESCED in his desire, on his account, more than my own; for, as his constitution was become extremely delicate, I hoped the change of air, might be of service to him. We lived at Montauban, for near two years, during which time I had the constant anguish of beholding my dear husband's health decline, daily.

As he was perfectly sensible of his own situation, he determined to take his little family to England, and to present his son to his unkind father. Every thing was fixed for our departure, when Providence, to whose all-wise decrees I bow myself beneath the dust, thought proper to recall the treasure he had lent us, and took my little cherubim, to join the heavenly choir !

No words can express the affliction of my loved lord, nor describe the wretched state, both of his mind, and body. Whole days he hung enamoured over the pale beauteous clay that was his child, nor would he be prevailed upon to resign it to corruption, till

242 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

weakness left him not the power of opposition.

FROM that time, he sunk into a state nearly approaching to insensibility, towards every thing, except myself; but, to his latest moment, his tenderness for me, was undiminished. Why should I dwell longer, upon a scene, which, but to think of, now, strains every nerve, and makes the blood run backward to its source! My misery was completed, by his death, in less than six weeks after that of my lovely boy!

BUT I will stay my sorrows, will forbid mine eyes to stream before you; and my heart, though full of anguish, shall from sighs refrain; for why should your humanity be grieved, or learn, from me, to mourn the lot of nature, doomed to care, and pain?

YOU may suppose that lady Somerville was, for some time, deprived of speech; nor was there one of us capable of interrupting the melancholy silence, but by our sighs. She, however, soon dried her tears, and resumed her discourse.—I shall relate the rest of my story, said she, though totally uninteresting

THE DELICATE DISTRESS 243

interesting to myself, as it will account for my present situation.

I WAS about four months gone with child, at the time of my lord's illness; and his last request to me was, that I would, if possible, lye-in in England, and acquaint his father with my pregnancy, as soon as I arrived there. He told me, that if the child, I carried, should be a son, it would inherit the fortune and honours of his family; but if not, that there was no provision made for me, or any daughters I might have, as he was under age, at the time he married; and that the estate was intailed, upon a very distant relation. He implored me to preserve my life, for the sake of the poor Laura; and to throw myself, and her, into his father's protection.

As it is utterly impossible that I should give you an adequate idea of my situation, at that time, I will not attempt it; but endeavour to cast a veil over that scene of distress, which no pen, no pencil, can ever be able to describe.

244 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

I SET out from Montauban, with my maid, my chaplain, and my child, and arrived safe in London. I obeyed my dear lord's request, and wrote immediately to his father. His lordship was then in the country. He answered my letter with great civility, mixed with an affectation of kindness: said, he should be in town, shortly; that he would then see me; and desired I would take care of myself, for the sake of the unborn babe, which he hoped would prove a son and heir.

IN a few days after I had received this letter, I was informed that there were persons appointed to attend me, till I was brought to bed, lest I should impose a surreptitious child, upon the family. I knew not that such proceedings were usual in my case, and I wrote a letter to my father-in-law, complaining of such treatment, to which he never deigned a reply.

BUT all their apprehensions on my account, were soon over: I was delivered, in the seventh month, of a dead son; and from that time, I heard nothing farther, from my lord's

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 245

lord's father, or any of his family, for above six months. The little money I had brought with me into England, was now quite exhausted ; and I was obliged to apply, heaven knows how unwillingly ! to this inhuman parent, for some means of support, for his son's widow, and his grandchild.

IN his reply to my letter, he told me what I knew before, that neither my daughter, nor I, were intitled to any thing, by law ; that, therefore, he advised me to go back to my own country, and he would furnish me with money, to carry me there ; provided I would leave Laura, in England, to his care. That if I should refuse these terms, I must even provide for myself, as it was not his purpose to offer me any others.

WHEN the mind has been once totally subdued by sorrow, we flatter ourselves, that we are incapable of being wounded, by any new distress : but the idea of being torn from the dear remains of my loved lord, my only child, convinced me that there were still some arrows, in the quiver of adversity, that had not yet been pointed at my peace.

246 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

I DID not hesitate, one moment, to determine that no consideration should make me consent to a separation, from all that was now dear to me on earth. I must, indeed, have been as absolutely void of humanity, as himself, if I could have resigned my child, into the hands of a man, who had never even desired to see her, before.

I WROTE, immediately, to my brothers, at Genoa, and acquainted them with my distress. They very kindly assured me, that they would receive me, and my daughter, with open arms, at our return; but if it should be my choice, to remain in England, they would take care that I should not want a support, there. They, immediately, remitted me bills for a thousand *piasters*, and agreed to settle the same sum, annually, upon me, or more, if I should have occasion for it.

AT this instance of generosity and affection, my heart once more became expanded with gratitude, to the Almighty, and with true sisterly tenderness, to my benefactors. I now began to make the first efforts towards subduing the violence of my grief, and to be sensible, that I might have been rendered still
more

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 247

more wretched, than I was, by the deprivation of my child, or our being reduced to slavery, for bread.

I soon fixed upon the plan of life, which I meant to pursue, and sent out my worthy chaplain, and my faithful maid, in search of a retirement, such as you now see. In this spot I have lived, about eight years; in which time, I have had no manner of converse, with any human creature, but my own family; which now consists of my daughter, my chaplain, and myself; my gardener, his wife, and the little maid, their daughter, whom your ladyship has seen.

THE only additional misfortune I have known, in this place, was the loss of my faithful Maria: she died, about two years since; and as my daughter was then of an age, not to need her attendance, I have never attempted to supply her place.

RUSTICATED so long as we have been, you will not, I hope, ladies, be surprized at the simplicity of mine, or my daughter's manners.—Our situation is certainly a very extraordinary one, and must naturally have

248 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

raised your curiosity, which I have endeavoured to gratify, by a plain and artless narrative.

I WISH, for your sakes, as well as my own, that my story had been less affecting; but I shall not make any apology for having drawn forth the lovely drop of sympathetic sorrow, which glowed with brighter lustre on your cheeks, than the most costly brilliant.

BOTH Lucy and I poured forth our thanks, for her kindness, and condescension, in relating her story; admired the constancy of her resolution, in remaining so long in retirement, but seemed to hope that she might change her purpose. I saw she was displeased at such a hint; but, with great politeness, said it was the only subject she did not wish to hear us talk upon, as it would always give her pain to dissent from our opinion, which she must ever do, both in word, and deed, upon that subject.

I THEN ventured to ask her, if she wished that miss Somerville should pass her life, in such a state of seclusion? She said, by no means;—so far from it, that she had sent forth

forth a thousand fruitless wishes, that some lucky accident might happen to introduce her to persons of sense, and virtue, and of a proper rank, to lead her gently into life;—that she had heard the characters of all the persons of fashion, in that neighbourhood, from her chaplain, who frequently mixed with the world, in order to transact her affairs;—that as she was above flattery, she was also superior to disguise, and frankly owned that her utmost wish, in this world, would be gratified, if lady Straffon would promise her protection, to her dear orphan.

I SCARCE suffered her to finish the latter part of her speech, before I flew to, and embraced her, and, with great truth, assured her, that my inclinations met hers, more than half way. I begged that, from that moment, she would do me the honour to consider me, as her sister; and that the lovely Laura might be henceforth deemed my niece.

EVERY thing, that delicate gratitude could dictate, was uttered, upon this occasion; and we all appeared to be infinitely happier, than we could have supposed it possible for us to

be, in so short a time after having been so much afflicted.

LADY Somerville concluded with informing me, that her father-in-law had been dead, about four years, and had left miss Somerville six thousand pounds. We agreed that Lucy should bring Laura to Straffon-Hill, to-morrow; and I promised to convey her back to her ladyship, whenever she required her attendance.

YOU cannot, my dear Emily; yes, you can, conceive, the sincere pleasure I feel, at having it in my power, to oblige the amiable, and unfortunate lady Somerville. It must certainly be an infinite relief to her mind, to know that her daughter has a friend, and protector, in case Providence should be pleased to put a period to her woes, and take her to his mercy. But she must, necessarily, suffer a great deal, in being separated from her, till use shall have made it easy.

LAURA is but just seventeen, though she looks rather older, from the gravity, and dignity of her appearance. I flatter myself you will receive some entertainment, from this narrative, which I have been as exact in,
as

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 251

as my memory would permit; and, indeed, it has, for the time, so intirely engrossed my attention, that I am pretty sure I have not omitted a circumstance of any consequence.

I EXPECT Sir John will return, from London, the beginning of next week.—I hope he will be charmed with our young visitor; and that lady Somerville will suffer him, sometimes, to spend an hour with her. Adieu, my dear Emily.

I am, as usual, affectionately your's,

F. STRAFFON.

L E T T E R X X X .

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

I MOST sincerely congratulate my dear Fanny, upon the acquisition she has made to her happiness, by her acquaintance with lady Somerville. There was something extremely romantic, in the opening of your adventure, and I almost began to imagine, that you had taken a trip, to Fairy-land ; but every circumstance, though surprizing, at first, is very naturally accounted for, in the course of your narrative. I truly compassionate the unhappy lady's situation ; and again felicitate you, on having it in your power, to remove a very material part of her distress, by affording your friendship, and protection, to her daughter.

LADY Somerville's misfortunes are of the hopeless kind ; it is not in the power of fate, to restore her husband, or her son ; and slight observers would, for these reasons, pronounce her much more wretched, than those who are led on, by a faint glimpse of hope, to wander through the thorny paths of life, in search
of

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 253

of some imaginary bliss, which still eludes their grasp. But I think otherwise. When the grave closes on our joys, our prospects of this world, must all end there; we can no more deceive ourselves, or be deceived. We sink, it is true, and fall with the dear prop, which fate has torn away. Then reason, and religion, come to our aid; and, when the first wild starts of grief, are over, an humble acquiescence in the divine will, soothes our sad souls to peace; our hopes spring forward to another goal, and pierce beyond the stars.

BUT while vain doubts and fears torment the heart, while passion has possession of the soul, and still impels us forward, through a maze, where our bewildered reason finds no clue, where peace is lost, and keen disquiet fills its vacant place; where our desires are raised, but to be mocked, and cruelty repaid for artless love!—Sure, sure, this state is worse, far worse, than lady Somerville's! She feels the stroke of death; but lady Harriet feels a living torture! inflicted, too, by whom her soul adored!

I HAVE

254 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

I HAVE been led into this reflection, by observing, that lady Harriet's health, and spirits, have declined, visibly, ever since her unlucky interview with captain Barnard; and I am certain, that his almost perpetual residence, at Ransford-Hall, increases her disquiet. In his first act of inconstancy, she might, with great reason, imagine that fortune only had turned the scale, in favour of her rival, and she had still the melancholy consolation of supposing herself beloved, though by a worthless man.

Hrs present attachment can arise, only from choice, or galantry; and it is certainly much more difficult, to bear contempt, than injury. Had he died, at the time he left her in Paris, her grief for his loss, would, by this time, have been softened into a gentle melancholy, which, though it might for ever have barred her pretensions to happiness, would not have rendered her half so wretched, as she is, at this moment, and, I fear, will ever be.

LET not what I have said, upon this subject, make my dear Fanny think, that I am not extremely affected, with lady Somerville's distress.—

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 255

distress.—I acknowledge that her sufferings have been great, but they certainly came to a period, when her husband died; and time has, I doubt not, insensibly lessened her affliction. I also hope, that there is yet in reserve for her, the felicity of seeing her daughter perfectly amiable, and happy.

ADIEU, my dear Fanny; my lord, and all this family, salute you, and yours, most affectionately. I desire you will present my respects, to lady Somerville, and her daughter, both of whom I hope to have the pleasure of seeing, when next I am so happy, as to visit Straffon-Hill.

Your's, ever,

E. WOODVILLE.

L E T-

L E T T E R XXXI.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

My dear EMILY,

I AM so sincerely charmed at the hope of your prophecy, in favour of lady Somerville, being immediately accomplished, that I can neither think, speak, or write, upon any other subject.—Sir John returned, from London, in two days after Laura had become our guest; she and I were just come back from paying an evening visit, to lady Somerville, when he entered the drawing-room, and introduced a young Italian nobleman, who had been recommended to him, by one of his most intimate friends, at Paris.

I NEVER beheld a handsomer youth; tall, graceful, and finely made, with the strongest expression of sense and sweetness, in his countenance—as he cannot speak English, our conversation was intirely Italian, in which, though Lucy and I are tolerable proficient, we were greatly excelled by miss Somerville, who has had the advantage of conversing
with

with her mother, in that charming language, from her earliest infancy.

THE first two or three days, that our young foreigner spent with us, we imagined that his devoting the largest share of his time and conversation, to Laura, was owing to the easy fluency with which she spoke his native language; but his motives remained not long doubtful; he became very particular, in his inquiries about her, to Sir John, who gave him the fullest information of her birth, and situation in life. He seemed charmed at the account of both, and from that time, his assiduity towards her appeared, less embarrassed.

NOR is the gentle heart of Laura, insensible to his attentions: her blushes, when he is mentioned, and down-cast looks, when he addresses her, plainly discover the state of her artless mind. She is really a very fine creature, Emily, and I am truly anxious for her happiness. She has a sensibility, a frankness, a delicate ingenuousness of nature, not to be found in those, who have had much commerce with the world, which she owes
to

to her sequestered education, with a parent, whose natural softness has been increased, by a long acquaintance with affliction.

BUT, to the purpose—Last night, the enamoured Lodovico explained his sentiments, to Sir John, and intreated him to prevail on me, to introduce him to lady Somerville; though he confessed that he found Laura extremely averse to a proposal, which must for ever divide her, from the tenderest of mother's; but as she seemed to have no other objection, he flattered himself that this might be surmounted.

SIR John's friend, lord Mount Willis, who recommended Lodovico to him, informed him, that he is descended from one of the first families, at Genoa, that he is an only son, intitled to a very large fortune, and possessed of a still higher treasure—an unexceptionable character.

I NEEDED not much persuasion, to enter upon such a pleasing embassy.—I waited on lady Somerville, this morning; she seemed a little alarmed at Laura's not being with me.

me. I quickly removed her apprehensions, by explaining the cause of my visit. She heard me, with the utmost attention, but could not help dropping some tears, when I mentioned Laura's objection to quitting her.

LADY Straffon, said she, when I had finished my discourse, though my dear girl's affection awakens all my tenderness for her, I will not suffer her to sacrifice her welfare, to my selfish satisfaction.—The world contains but one object for me; let her be happy, and contribute to the happiness of a deserving husband, and I shall taste the only *joy*, my heart is capable of. And should that long absent *guest*, ever deign to visit me, again, it is to you, the blessed minister of Providence, to whom I am indebted, for its presence.

I ENDEAVOURED to restrain the grateful effusions of her generous heart, by assuring her, that I felt almost as much pleasure, as even she could be sensible of, from the prospect of Laura's future happiness.—We then agreed, that I should bring Laura and Lodovico,

260 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

to wait upon her, in the afternoon.—The instant I return, I will acquaint you with the result of our visit ; till then,

Adieu.

F. STRAFFON.

LET.

L E T T E R XXXII.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

(In continuation.)

JJOIN with me, my dearest Emily, in rejoicing at the happiness, which opens to the view of our amiable friends. But I will not detain you from the events which create their present joy. I carried my two young guests, Laura, and Lodovico, this afternoon, to lady Somerville's cottage; she received us with her usual grace and elegance; but when I presented signior Lodovico, to her, I fancied I perceived a change of countenance, which I knew not how to account for. However, she presently recovered herself, and continued to entertain us, with the greatest politeness.

AFTER tea, I took Laura into the garden, under pretence of admiring a little grotto, she had lately finished, in order to give the young gentleman an opportunity, of explaining his sentiments, to her mother. We had not been ten minutes absent, when the little country maid came running to us, and desired we should return, immediately.

WE

WE were not a little surprized, at this summons ; but judge how our wonder was increased, on finding lady Somerville, with her eyes streaming, and Lodovico seated by her, with an air that spoke him a sharer in her emotions ! The moment we entered the room, she started up, and taking her daughter's hand, Come, said she, come and embrace your cousin, the son of that friend, that more than brother, to whom we have been indebted for the means of life, so many years.

POOR Laura was unable to speak ; but her eyes fully expressed the tender, and grateful sentiments of her heart. The enraptured Lodovico seemed totally absorbed, in the pleasure of gazing on her.—After some time, lady Somerville turning to me, said, You see before you, my dear lady Straffon, the only son of count Melespini.—The instant I saw him, I was struck with the resemblance of that much-loved brother—but how could I flatter myself, with the happiness of beholding his son !

AND now, my dear children, continued she, though my consent awaits ye, be assured,
 7 that

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 263

that without the count's concurrence, this union never can take place; write to him, therefore, Lodovico, and let both him and you rest satisfied, that his will shall, in this affair, determine mine.

IN the mean time, I hope, said she, your ladyship will dispense with Laura's attendance, at Straffon-Hill. Perhaps my brother may have other views, for his son; if so, it is best not to indulge an affection, too far, which may be productive of unhappy consequences: for be assured, that however deserving the object, however virtuous the attachment, no marriage can be truly blest, that pains a parent's heart.—A too energetic sigh accompanied these words: but; added she, when lady Straffon honours me with her company, I hope my nephew will attend her.

It was very visible that Lodovico complied, reluctantly, with these conditions; and, perhaps, Laura, for the first time, found obedience difficult.—But as her ladyship seemed determined, a bow of assent, was the only reply that was made. Signior Lodovico, and I, returned home, soon after this conversation.

By

264 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

By the way, he accounted to me, for not knowing that lady Somerville, or Laura, were related to him, as he had always heard them called Statevilla, which is their name, in Italian. I find he intends making as much use, as possible, of the privilege of attending me to lady Somerville's; so that I expect to pass much of my time, at the cottage.

He is now retired, to acquaint his father with the happy discovery he has made, of his relations, and his sentiments towards his fair cousin. I shall be truly impatient, for the count's answer.—I hope it will be favourable; if it should not, I fear all lady Somerville's precaution will be insufficient to prevent the attachments of the young people, though I believe it would be impossible to draw Laura from her obedience.

I HAVE been so much engaged, in the affairs of the Somerville family, for these two days, that I have scarce had leisure to think of my own.—You must, therefore, excuse my not entering upon the critical distinctions you have made, on the various modes of misery, in your last letter. I heartily wish you would take the opposite extreme,

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 265

extreme for your subject, and descant on
your own happiness; which I believe to be
as perfect, as this frail state will admit of.
May it long continue so, sincerely wishes,

Your affectionate,

F. STRAFFON.

L E T T E R XXXIII.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFEON.

I Do indeed, my dear Fanny, sincerely rejoice at the pleasing prospects which seem to open to your new friends ; I also congratulate you, on being, in so high a degree, instrumental to their happiness.—I think I may almost say, that Providence seems to interest itself, in the future fate, of the amiable Laura.

THERE is something very particular, in your becoming accidentally acquainted with lady Somerville, so critically.—Had your meeting with this charming woman, been deferred, but a month longer, the connection between ye, might, in all probability, have been only productive of unavailing good wishes, and mutual esteem ;—but the lucky arrival of signior Lodovico, has made you a principal performer, in the great drama of Laura's life.

THOUGH not an absolute predestinarian, I am apt to believe, that there is a sort of fate,
in

in marriage; and, as one absurdity creates another, I find I must lean a little to the Manichean doctrine, to establish my thesis; by supposing that there is a good, and an evil genius, which presides, occasionally, at that great crisis, on which all the colour of our future lives, depend. I sincerely hope that Laura's union with the young Melespini, will be completed under the happiest auspices.—I do not feel one doubt arise in my mind, with regard to his father's consent.—The only cloud which I foresee, to intercept the brightest sunshine, will arise from the separation of lady Somerville, and Laura—but that, like a cloud, also, will pass away:—for though the tenderest affection for a husband, does not oppose the natural claims of parents, or relations, on our hearts, it, in some measure, lessens their force.—Our hopes, and fears, are directed to another object; and self-love strengthens our attachment to that person, on whom we find our happiness depends.

You see I have a passion for philosophizing upon every subject;—where incidents do not abound, it would be impossible to keep up even a monthly correspondence, without these

268 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

little aids ; I will not call them arts, for I detest the mean idea, which is conveyed by that expression.

I SHALL be glad to have my expectations gratified, by hearing of the count's immediate concurrence with his son's inclinations.—In the mean time, I beg you to present my compliments to lady Somerville, and her fair daughter, and to assure them, that I regret my not having the pleasure of being known to them.—Fanny Weston is quite transported, at the happy meeting of Lodovico and Laura ; but says, she can scarce believe it true, because it is likely to end, so fortunately.

I CAN perceive that lady Harriet has doubts, with regard to the event ; but as she finds me sanguine on the subject, she suppresses them.—Sir James Thornton, with a sigh, exclaimed, what an happy man is Lodovico, to find the object of his passion, disengaged ! This has left us more in the dark, than ever, with regard to his attachment, for I am pretty sure lady Harriet is not his object.

I CANNOT help remarking, upon this occasion, how much the particularities of our
own

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 269

own situation, affect our judgments, with regard to others; and how much more than we are willing to allow, our opinions are warped, and biaſſed, by it, even in matters that appear indifferent to us.—Adieu, my Fanny!—True love from me, and mine, to you, and yours.

E. WOODVILLE.

L E T T E R XXXIV.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

MY dear Emily shall, from henceforth, be our augur.—Be her predictions fortunate, and be they ever verified !

THE wished-for packet is, at length, arrived ;—it contained a letter for Lodovico, and one for lady Somerville.—The moment he had read his, which was fraught with congratulations from all his friends, and the most plenary indulgence from his fond father, to his ardent wishes, he intreated me to go with him, instantly, to the cottage.—We almost flew there ; and Lodovico, in the highest rapture, acquainted lady Somerville and his loved Laura, with the glad tidings.

LADY Somerville received the news, with tears of joy : conflicting passions warred in Laura's face ; gladness and grief took turns. The bright suffusion of her cheek, the brilliant animation of her eyes, expressed her heart-felt joy : but when she turned those eyes

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 271

eyes upon her mother, their radiance was obscured by starting tears; the transient roses fled from her fair cheek, and left the lily mistrefs of the field.

LADY Somerville was affected by these sudden emotions, and retired to peruse her brother's letter.—She returned soon, and giving it into my hands, said, with a sigh, By this you may judge if I flattered my brother, by calling him the most generous of men. Alas! why must I appear unworthy of his kindness, by declining it? but when he knows my reasons for so doing, I hope he will acquiesce in them, and pardon me.

UPON reading the count's letter, I found, that after testifying his joy, at his son's attachment to Laura, he added, that it was from the mother's hand, he hoped to receive the daughter; and conjured her, by the friendship that had ever subsisted between them, to return to her native country, with her children, to hold the first place in his house, and to contribute, by her presence, to restore that happiness, which had been deeply wounded, by the loss of an amiable wife.

272 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

WHEN I had finished the letter, which I read aloud, I feel myself unhappy, said lady Somerville, in not being able to comply with my kind brother's request.—It is long, much longer, than I thought it would be, since I devoted the remnant of my wretched days, to solitude.—Here I have lived, and here will pass that portion of my life, which heaven may yet allot me.

As she spoke, I thought I saw her expressive eyes fixed on her lord's picture, as if addressing her vows to him. But she had scarcely finished, when Laura, springing from her seat, fell at her mother's feet, and catching her hand, cried out, My more than parent! is it possible your love for me, should have so little power? and could you part, so easily, with her, whom I have often heard you call the living transcript of your dear dead lord? But Laura must not, cannot quit her mother! all pleasing prospects vanish, at that thought; which makes the world appear even more a solitude, than ever I found this cottage.

THE parent's heart was touched.—No, my beloved child, said she, I will not bar
your

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 273

your happiness.—Since you desire it, I will again behold the fatal place which gave me birth, and even strive to lose the sad remembrance of my griefs, in your felicity.—I owe this sacrifice to Laura's filial tenderness.—What would my child have more?

TEARS and embraces supplied the place of language, or rather superseded it, for some time; but when their emotions had subsided, the young pair expressed their joy and gratitude, at lady Somerville's condescension, in the most proper terms; and the evening was spent in such a manner, as could only be pleasing to those, who are blest with feeling hearts.

THE count has accompanied his letter with a very noble present, to enable his sister and niece, to appear as the widow, and daughter, of lord Somerville.—There is something above pride, in that thought.

As Lodovico and I returned home, he entreated me to use my interest with lady Somerville, to consent to his being privately married, by her ladyship's chaplain, before
they

274 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

they set out for Genoa.—I think she can have
no objection to this request.

I HOPE I shall be able, in a few days, to
send my Emily an account, that this affair is
happily concluded.

Till then, adieu.

F. STRAFFORD.

L E T.

LETTER XXXV.

Lady STRAFFON, To Lady WOODVILLE.

WHEN the subjects are pleasing, I find narrative writing not so dull, as I once thought—I begin to fear I shall make but a poor figure, in the epistolary way, when I have concluded my little novel ; for I honestly confess, that my dear Emily beats me, all to nothing, in the moralizing strain.—Sorry am I, on this account, only, that I must now proceed to the denouement, of my simple, yet interesting story.

LADY Somerville desired two days to consider of Lodovico's proposal ; at the end of that time, she expressed her consent, in a most elegant letter to me.—She said, that as she had, on every occasion, concurred with my requests, she hoped I would not think her too presuming to make one to me ; which was, that I would accept of her cottage, with every thing which it contained, except her lord's picture, and that, with my permission, she would fill its vacant place, with Laura's portrait.

I WAS

276 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

I was both pleased, and distressed, at her politeness, and generosity.—I accepted her present. — In that charming sejour, I shall spend many hours, in thinking of its amiable owner, and in reflecting on the inscrutable ways of Providence, who after so many trials, has been pleased to restore this valuable woman, to her country, and her friends.

SUCH characters as hers, were never meant to droop in obscurity ; she owes herself to society, and will, I hope, recover some degree of that happiness, she thinks totally lost, in the exercise of those virtues, which in her retired state, she could never be called on to exert.

SLIGHT as the preparations were for a wedding, which it was determined should be private, they took up every moment of our time, till yesterday morning ; when Lodovico, Lucy, Sir John, my little Emily, and I, set out together, for the cottage, before breakfast.—We were received by lady Somerville, and the charming bride, with that graceful ease and politeness, which is the result of good sense, and operates equally upon
all

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 277

all occasions. After breakfast, Sir John led Laura into the chapel. Lady Somerville presented her hand, to Lodovico; the priest and altar were prepared; Sir John had the honour of personating Laura's father, and had the pleasure of completing Lodovico's wishes, by bestowing her hand, where she had already given her heart. The fervour of lady Somerville's devotion, was truly edifying; when the ceremony was over, she endeavoured, in vain, to suppress her tears; but they were tears of joy.

SIR John presented the bride with a pair of ear-rings, and a cross of diamonds, and I had the pleasure of placing my picture in a bracelet, upon lady Somerville's arm. From the elegance of our dinner and supper, at the cottage, I apprehend that lady Somerville is one of those extraordinary characters, who do not think that the most refined understanding, or the most exalted sentiments, place a woman above the little duties of life.

THE new married couple are to dine with me, this day. Sir John is gone to try if he can prevail upon lady Somerville, to accompany them. Next week, they set out, for
Genoa;

278 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

Genoa; they are to occupy our house, in town, while they stay in London. May their voyage thither, and through life, be attended with prosperous gales! Amen, and adieu,

My dear sister,

F. STRAFFON.

LET-

THE DELICATE DISTRESS. 279

LETTER XXXVI.

Lady WOODVILLE, To Lady STRAFFON.

I SINCERELY congratulate my dear Fanny, on the fortunate denouement of her pleasing and interesting narrative, and join in her good wishes for the happiness of lady Somerville, and the new married pair.—As you seem inclined to rally me, on my turn for moralizing, I shall not exert it, at present, though I think lady Somerville's story a very proper subject for it.

BUT to deal ingenuously, I have a stronger reason, for declining to expatiate on it, than what I have mentioned, which is my being stinted in time, as I am going to dine, at lord Withers's, where we shall stay, this night. On Thursday, we are to dine at Sir William Lawson's, and Friday is fixed, for our setting out, for York.

THIS short letter will, probably, be the last you will receive from me, till my return from thence. If I were mistress of myself, our correspondence should not be interrupted, on

280 THE DELICATE DISTRESS.

that account. If I were superstitious, I would not go to York, as I cannot help feeling a kind of præsentiment, against it. Why did lord Seymour attempt to inspire me with this disgust? I will not reason farther, upon the subject. "*Obedience* is better than SACRIFICE;" but pray is not that, sometimes the greatest we can make?

AFFECTIONATE regards, and sincere congratulations, wait on the hosts, and guests, at Straffon-Hill, from all this house, and from

Your's, most truly,

E. WOODVILLE.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.